SULTAN SALAHUDDIN AYYUBI

Naima Sohaib

Muslim Heroes series No. 10

Translated by Eman Asif Misbah

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Smashwords Edition

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Available in print at Dawah Books

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Translated from the Urdu book “Tareekh-e-Islam ki Azeem Shakhsiat” by Naima Sohaib

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Foreword

All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

This booklet is tenth in a series, translated from a book compiled on Muslim heroes by my good friend Naima Sohaib. The selection includes Muslim scholars, philosophers, reformers and military generals. It tells us about these unique individuals who selflessly worked for the cause of Islam. I hope that Muslims today will find their stories a source of inspiration.

The current narrative is about an acclaimed Muslim general who spent almost his whole life on the battlefield. Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi was from a Kurdish background and was born in 1138. His formal military career began at the age of 14 years. He fought over a hundred battles and bravely fought the Crusaders for 20 years. In the Battle of Hittin in 1187, he dealt the Crusaders a final blow from which they never recovered.

Some of his most ardent admirers are European biographers. What attracts them is his perfect sense of enlightened moderation and cultured chivalry. To the west, he is known as 'Saladin'. Because of his magnanimity, chivalry and evenhandedness, he became immensely popular with the masses – be they Muslim or Christians. In him, nature had harmoniously blended the benevolent heart of a Muslim and a matchless military genius.

May Allah reward Sana Dossul, Sameera Dadabhoy and Sohaib Umar for the editing, Nadeem Siddiqui for the designing and Asif Misbah, my husband, for his constant encouragement and support.

Eeman Asif Misbah

Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi

The Decisive Victor of the Crusades and the Liberator of Bait ul Maqdas from Christian Hold

Introduction

His name was Salahuddin Ayyubi and he belonged to an honourable Kurdish tribe (now part of Iraq and Turkey). This tribe was known for its hospitability, courage and bravery. They were proud of their reputation and honoured it wholeheartedly.

Salahuddin's grandfather, Shaadi Sultan, was appointed the ruler of the fort at Takreet during the regime of Masood Saljooqi. After the death of his grandfather, Salahuddin's father, Najamuddin was nominated as the sovereign of the fort. He was kindhearted, well-mannered, generous, a patron of letters and a benefactor of the scholars.

Birth and Childhood Events

Salahuddin was born in 532 Hijri or the year 1138 A.D. in the fort at Takreet. The day he was born was the very day that his father was dismissed from his stately position and asked to vacate the city. Various reasons have been quoted for his removal from office. Whatever the actual reason, Salahuddin's father and his uncle, Sher Koh, presented themselves before the great monarch, Atabuk Azam Imaduddin Zangi. Here, they were received with much fanfare. Imaduddin Zangi had not forgotten the favor that Najamuddin had once done to him.

It so happened that in the year 1132, the vanquished army of Sultan Zangi was making an effort to cross the River Tigris but

to no avail. Najamuddin, who was then the ruler of the fort at Takreet, gathered a fleet of wooden boats with the help of which the army crossed safely to the other bank. To return the favour, Imaduddin Zangi granted a lot of valuable property to his benefactor and also gave him the charge of the Fort of Ba'albak.

When the Sultan died, Salahuddin was merely 9 years old. His father and uncle took him to the son of the monarch, Noorudin Mahmood Bin Zangi. Sultan Nooruddin was so impressed by their courage, dignity and organizational abilities that he made them his close associates and appointed them as commanders of his army.

Maturity and Opportunity for Jihad

There are no detailed historical accounts of Salahuddin's childhood. However, when he turned 16, he began to accompany his father and uncle to the court of the Sultan. Even at such a tender age, Salahuddin was composed and levelheaded. Sultan Nooruddin could perceive in him the qualities of courtesy, astuteness, intellect and valor. Under his personal supervision, he began to send the lad on military expeditions. Salahuddin had a conciliatory, mild and non-aggressive nature. At this age, he was hardly interested in fighting and warfare.

Salahuddin accompanied the second expedition to Egypt on the orders of the Sultan. He later expressed that he felt as if his heart had been pierced by a sharp knife. But the Sultan did not pay any heed to his emotions and instead, readied for him suitable weaponry for the battlefield. The helpless youth succumbed in the face of the royal command. This incident has been recorded in detail by Ibn Aseer.

Fate had compelled Salahuddin towards jihad. It would be appropriate to give a background of the events unfolding at the

time.

At the end of the 11th century A.D. the situation in the Middle East took a turn for the worst and the Muslims were confronted with internal strife and external aggression. The Caliph of the Muslim Empire in Baghdad was helpless and incapable of handling the alarming situation. Syria was comprised of a number of small Arab states, each of which was controlled by an independent chief. The grand empire of the Suljooqi Turks had been shattered. However, Imaduddin Zangi, who had been raised under the supervision of the Suljooqi Turks, slowly started to gain strength. Earlier he was the ruler of Mosul and upper Aljazirah. Over a period of time he strategically occupied the small territories around him and laid the foundation of a united state comprising of Syria, Aljazirah and Kurdistan.

Imaduddin Zangi was strict in the implementation of state policy. He established a legal system wherein the poor could seek justice. The Sultan was conscientious about his heavy responsibilities, diligent by nature, and kept a ready watch on the military moves of the west. He admired and encouraged the same traits in others. Not only did he have to contend with internal dissensions but the external onslaughts of the Crusaders as well.

The Sultan was busy with his military expeditions when a freed slave of his, taking advantage of an opportunity, murdered him. His son Nooruddin Zangi incidentally proved to be a more able general than his father. During his reign, he constantly encountered attacks from the Crusaders. They were an aggressive lot and wherever they found a weak front, they would waste no opportunity to instigate an assault to occupy the territory.

Incidentally, the Crusaders captured Asqalan which posed a serious threat to Egypt. There, the rule of the Fatimid Caliphate was on the decline. The situation was so grave that the state

power had become a pastime among the nobles and the ministers. The Crusaders had been eyeing the Fatimid treasures and wanted to capture the valley of the Nile, hence they began skirmishes on the borders of Egypt.

Historical Background of the Crusades

Who were the Crusaders? Why did they engage in constant combat with the Muslims? What were their objectives? Till we answer these questions, we cannot appreciate the achievements of Salahuddin Ayyubi.

Baitul Maqdas had been conquered during the caliphate of Umar (RA). This was the beginning of Muslims' direct confrontation with the Christian world. It is a historical fact that Umar (RA) and subsequent caliphs treated their non-Muslim subjects in an honourable manner. Their places of worship and the pilgrims were always given respect and protection. This benevolent and tolerant attitude was continued by succeeding rulers till the emergence of the Banu Fatima Dynasty. When the House of Banu Fatima took possession of Syria and Jerusalem, the Christians were not treated well. On the other hand, moral decadence had crept into Christian society because of which their pilgrims would destroy peace and order wherever they went. Hence the government chose to deal with the hostile elements sternly.

One of the pilgrims by the name of Peter the Hermit was prejudiced against the Muslims. He was frustrated because of the harsh treatment meted out to him in Palestine and his mind festered with hatred for a long time. According to Peter himself, once when he was prostrating at the grave of Jesus, he heard the voice of Jesus urging him to stand up and propagate the difficulties of the people of Christ. Peter perceived that Jesus further advised that this was the opportune time for Christians living in Muslims territories to get some respite and the time to capture back the holy places.

This vision of the Christ gave Peter the impetus to move ahead at lightning speed. He approached the Pope Urban II and suggested his plan for the conquest of Syria and Jerusalem. The Pope welcomed the suggestion and made Peter responsible for propagating the message. Peter went from town to town, highlighting the miserable condition of the Christians. He would gain their sympathy and support by making emotional appeals, by waving the cross blindly, by thumping his chest in agony and grief, and by moaning and wailing his heart out. A large group of people became his followers and they were of the opinion that he was a messenger from God.

Meanwhile, the Roman Emperor, who was afraid of losing Constantinople to the Turks, sent an envoy to the Pope requesting military help. In return, the Emperor promised vast treasures of the Roman Empire. The first council established for this purpose proved fruitless. The second council was convened which met ten times. There was such a large concentration of priests and chiefs in these gatherings that the city walls could barely contain them. The emotionally charged sermons given by the Pope and Peter threw the masses into a frenzy, the effect of which lasted for many centuries. This burning desire would not be extinguished even after consuming the blood of hundreds of thousands of men. When the council concluded, the populace echoed with the words 'this is God's will'. An army was mustered and sent forth on the day that Jesus was raised up to the Heavens. This war thus came to be called the Crusade.

The First and Second Crusades

The movements to 'free up' Syria and Jerusalem from Muslims sent the Christian world into a wave of emotional and military activity. The saints and priests came out of seclusion from their sanctuaries. The sages came out of the forests. Dacoits and thieves repented for their sins and got hold of the cross. Thus a

large number of people from all walks of life – labourers, aristocrats, traders – left their occupations for the moment and joined the multitude of crusaders for the greater cause.

Fathers would lead their sons by the hand and ask them to fight for Jesus until death or victory. To the extent that slave women and children also joined the throng. Peter the Hermit was now surrounded by a horde of several hundred thousand. They did not wait for the official army to join them and marched forth in the spring of 1096 A.D. On the way they were joined by crowds of villagers who wanted to support this mission.

The first army of Crusaders was sent under the command of Walter the Pennyless. This was not an organized infantry led by a capable general but more like a huge gathering of religious extremists and emotionally charged Christians . In the beginning they were received warmly and cheered on by the inhabitants of the cities and villages they passed through. However, when they reached Bulgaria, the local people there who were not devout Christians refused to give them free rations. The ill-organized contingent were offended and turned aggressive against the Bulgarians. In the ensuing fight, the whole brigade was obliterated.

The next contingent that included 40,000 men and women was sent under the command of Peter himself. Peter was a hermit and thus inexperienced in worldly matters. He could not arrange sufficient provisions for the journey, with the result that the army had to resort to supplication and begging in order to survive. When they reached the site where the Bulgarians had annihilated the previous band of soldiers, they were filled with anger and vengefully attacked and killed 7,000 locals. When the Caesar of Rome heard about this mishap he was so alarmed that he sent an army aboard ships to take them across the Bosphorus.

These Crusaders openly committed excesses on thousands of

Muslims as soon as they stepped into the Asian continent. They snatched children from the laps of anguished mothers and slew them. In blind prejudice they unleashed a wave of terror on the inhabitants. Under the banner of the Crusades, they committed such horrors that one trembles at the carnage they wrought. These militants were eventually confronted in a battle by Qaleej Arsalan who gave them a crushing defeat.

The third group of crusaders emerged from Germany. They were ignorant and crude. Instead of focusing on their mission, they lost sight of their goals and started looting, plundering and killing the people they passed on the way. Tired of their pillage and ransacking, the Hungarians taught them a lesson and the vast plains of Belgrade were strewn with the dead bodies of the Crusaders.

These unsuccessful attempts were not enough to discourage the European nations. They were in fact filled with even more zeal to continue with the mission. In 1097 A.D. the small kingdoms of Europe put together a formidable force including an infantry of 500,000 and a cavalry of 100,000. After one year of facing terrible hardships encompassing epidemics and famine, the army succeeded in conquering Antarkiya in mid 1098 A.D. which provided the stepping stone for future conquests in the East. A year later, Jerusalem also succumbed to their onslaught. For the next few weeks, enmasse killings were witnessed in the city. In Masjid al Aqsa alone, 70,000 Muslims were butchered. The courtyard of the mosque was knee deep in blood. A council announced death penalties for the surviving Muslims. Some were thrown brutally from rooftops, others were burnt to death, and dead bodies piled up everywhere. A small number of Muslims were fortunate enough to be able to escape this dreadful fate. They eventually appeared before the Caliph in the court of Baghdad and gave a horror-stricken account of the massacre in Jerusalem. Unfortunately they did not receive much from the court except a discouraging response, a show of

sympathy and false promises.

For the next thirty years, the Muslim and Christian forces were constantly at war with each other. The Christians continued the onslaught despite regular defeats. The year 1131 A.D. saw a strong government in place at Jerusalem. They had managed to annex the territories of Akka, Sur and Tarablus from Egyptian rule. On the other hand, the Muslim monarchs had been weakened due to constant battles amongst themselves as well as with the Christians. Only four cities of Halb, Hums, Hamat and Damascus were left on the Egyptians frontiers; even these were exposed to constant danger and were in no state to withstand an attack. Muslim trade caravans had long since ceased to operate because of Christian raids. The streets posed a deserted look. The cities that were yet unconquered would give a tax to the Christians in order to appease them.

It was at this time that Imaduddin Zangi came into power. First he united Muslim ranks by confronting all Muslim chiefs. Then he turned his focus towards the Christians. After conquering territories on the way, he finally conquered the province of Edisa. He gained a lot of prominence in Muslim circles and on the orders of the caliph in Baghdad, his name was mentioned in the invocations during Friday sermons. The conquests of Imaduddin Zangi were escalating when he was abruptly murdered in his sleep by a slave. His son Nooruddin Zangi ascended the throne, and proved to be a brave and undeterred general like his father. He was not one to be a mere observer and followed in his father's footsteps.

The Christians could not reconcile with the loss of the province of Edisa easily and in retaliation they conducted a covert night operation. Unfortunately for them, they fell into their own trap and at the hands of Nooruddin they suffered a humiliating defeat.

These appalling conditions inspired some priests to again

approach the European nations to identify the imminent dangers from the Zangi clan. Their scheme proved to be successful and a preacher called St. Bernard fired the Christian countries with enthusiasm for the Crusade. The Kings of France and Germany promised to lend military support for the cause. In this second crusade, the King of Germany led a huge army. The Muslims at the frontiers of Qonea caught him unawares. He was overwhelmed and forced to return to his country. Next the Emperor of France proceeded with his army with the conquest of Damascus in mind. This city had considerably weakened through the ages but the Muslim inhabitants did not concede defeat easily. After a long drawn-out war and several sieges, the French army was exhausted and was forced to return to Europe. This was the end of the Second Crusade.

Nooruddin Zangi conquered the city of Damascus and appointed Sher Koh as the ruler, who was incidentally the uncle of Salahuddin Ayyubi. Najamuddin, the father of Salahuddin, was already a close comrade and special advisor of the Sultan. Hence a constant link was created between Salahuddin and the royal court.

The Christians were not ready to sit complacently and watch. They captured Asqalan which was under the Egyptian caliphate. They kept a vigilant eye on Egypt which had weakened considerably and was in dire straits. In those days, a popular minister named Shawar Saadi, who had become very powerful, was banished from Egypt due to some reason. He promptly appeared in the court of Nooruddin Zangi, and complained of the mistreatment meted out to him. Sultan Zangi had been anxiously aware of the faltering state of Egypt. He decided to send a force under the command of Sher Koh (uncle of Salahuddin Ayyubi) to assist Shawar. Sher Koh was successful in his effort and Egypt fell into his hands. Unfortunately, Shawar did not honour the commitment that he would pay one-third of the state's income to Sher Koh's army and he asked him

to leave Egypt. Not only that, he also threatened to seek help from the Crusaders, who promptly sent an expedition led by Emmalurk, the French king of Jerusalem.

Sher Koh was forced to retreat into a fortress along with a handful of soldiers. When Nooruddin Zangi heard of the breach of promise and the arrival of the Crusader king, he laid siege to and then captured a city called Haaram which was located near Antakia and Tarablus and was under Christian control. When the Crusader army in Egypt heard the news, they rapidly lifted their siege and retreated. Sher Koh was able to return to the court of Nooruddin in Damascus with his regiment. He convinced Nooruddin of the susceptible and vulnerable position of the Egyptian state. It was obvious that if they did not advance to take over the country, it would be besieged by the Christian forces. The Sultan agreed and prepared for the attack. This time, Salahuddin accompanied his uncle in the expedition to Egypt.

Meanwhile, the Crusaders had lined up at a place called Baneen. The ensuing battle was incredible, with a few thousand Muslim soldiers giving a crushing defeat to the Christians. In retaliation, the Crusaders laid siege to Alexandria in Egypt. Salahuddin Ayyubi and his army managed to save the city with great courage. Subsequently, Sher Koh also conquered neighbouring areas. Ultimately a peace accord was signed by both parties and the armies returned peacefully to their countries.

As soon as Sher Koh returned to his territory, the Christians dishonoured their agreement. They made a pact with Shawar whereby they were allowed to retain their representative in Cairo and maintain an army in Egypt on state expense. Now a new series of outrages were launched against the Muslims. The Fatimid Caliph, a mere puppet, again besieged Nooruddin Zangi for help. The Sultan dispatched a force under the command of

Sher Koh. This was the same expedition in which Salahuddin Ayyubi had unwillingly accompanied his uncle. On hearing the news of the approaching army, the Crusaders fled from Egypt. The Muslim army was welcomed with fanfare by the Fatimid Caliph Aazid and the local Egyptians. On the orders of the Caliph, the miscreant Shawar was beheaded and Sher Koh was declared the Prime Minister and Commander in Chief of the armed forces. Incidentally, Sher Koh died after just two months of this expedition.

As Prime Minister of Egypt

After the death of Sher Koh, Caliph Aazid's attention turned towards his young nephew who had already impressed him with his military prowess. Hence Saladuddin was appointed the Prime Minister of Egypt. He was given the title of Malik un Nasir (The Helpful Ruler).

After assuming the high post, Salahuddin became more focused and responsible. To develop friendlier relations with his subordinates, he became very generous with his spending. This helped him gain popularity with the masses, the nobility and the government officials. He sought the company of religious scholars. Instead of occupying the luxurious palaces, he settled for a small house. Salahuddin patronized the righteous scholars and Imams and ignored the Shiite element present in Egypt. This created resentment among the Shiite scholars; as a result, they launched a covert campaign against Salahuddin. Fortunately, this operation was discovered in due time and promptly dealt with.

This underground scheme was not yet fully crushed when Salahuddin was informed of yet another Crusade attack from the Christians of Jerusalem. They first laid siege to Damiat but nature intervened and a terrible storm destroyed their entire fleet. Severe rains uprooted their tents, the soldiers insisted on lifting the siege in order to turn back and the king was forced to

return to Europe with a failed mission.

Now Salahuddin Ayyubi was able to lay the foundation of a stable empire in Egypt. After some time, the Fatimid Caliph Aazid also passed away; that was the end of the Fatimid Dynasty in Egypt. During this time, there arose some misunderstanding between Salahuddin and Nooruddin Zangi, but this was resolved with the timely intervention by the former's father, Najmuddin. In 1173 A.D., Najmuddin succumbed to death.

Barely a year passed by when the news of the untimely death of the celebrated Nooruddin Zangi shocked the Muslim world. In the history of Muslim rulers, very few equal Sultan Nooruddin in terms of justice, benevolence, astuteness, piety and struggle in the way of Allah. Unfortunately, his successor to the throne was an 11 year old boy named Swaleh, who was totally under the influence of a few nobles in the court. Swaleh had to leave Egypt for Damascus as the situation deteriorated due to continued infighting among the nobles and the ministers. One of these aristocrats, Saaduddin Gumushtageen, subsequently led the boy from Damascus to Halb, leaving the city undefended against the onslaught of the Christian forces. The Christians were always on the lookout for an opportunity to attack and they immediately surrounded the city. The helpless citizens of Damascus paid a heavy ransom to lift the siege and they implored Salahuddin for assistance. It would be relevant o mention that Salahuddin had issued a coin in Egypt bearing Swaleh's name in order to prove his allegiance to the new Sultan.

Salahuddin Ayyubi reached Damascus in great consternation amid welcoming cries of the inhabitants who gratefully threw open the city gates for him. Instead of turning towards the Sultan's palace, he made his way to his father's house. He sent reassuring messages to Swaleh about his noble intention of

saving the city from disaster. Regretfully, he received taunts in return from the young Sultan who accused him of being a turncoat and an ingrate.

Salahuddin, filled with rage, took to Halb in order to prove his innocence to the young Caliph. Alas, Gumushtageen had poisoned his ears against Salahuddin. When he reached the city, Swaleh came to the market of Halb on horseback. He appealed to the inhabitants to save him from the malevolence of the ingrate, Salahuddin. The city dwellers actually sympathized with Swaleh and fought against Salahuddin but were obviously no match for him. Inspite of repeated proposals aimed at reconciliation, Salahuddin was not able to gain the favour of the Atabuk royal family. However, he retained his possession of Halb in order to save Syria from the Crusaders' threat.

Time after time, there were attacks from the Atabuk front, and they even sought the help of some extreme religious elements to eliminate Salahuddin, but all these attempts proved abortive. The majority of the Atabuks now accepted his control. In 1175 AD, the Caliph of Baghdad honoured him with the royal dress, signifying his acceptance of him as the ruler of Egypt and Syria. In 1181 A.D., within a year after the death of Swaleh, the heads of Western Asian states had accepted the leadership of Salahuddin Ayyubi. This included the Turkish ruler of Qonea and the sovereign of Armenia.

Salahuddin and the Crusades

During this entire period, the Crusaders had been clashing with Salahuddin from time to time. Immediately after the death of Sultan Nooruddin Zangi, the King of Jerusalem conspired with the emperor of Constantinople and attacked Egypt but they met with a crushing defeat.

Similar attacks by the Crusaders did not let Salahuddin rest in peace. If he relaxed his guard against them, they would lose no

opportunity to advance into Muslim territories. Hence a portion of the armed forces was always on high alert.

In 1178 A.D., the Sultan left Egypt with a view to conquer Asqalan and Gaza. When he reached Asqalan, he did not find an opposing force and the army dispersed in the city. Meanwhile, the Christians were able to muster a force against the Muslims. During the battle, the strategy adopted by the Muslim army failed and they were badly routed. The Sultan himself escaped with a few soldiers and lost his way in the desert. After a few days of hunger and thirst, he reached Egypt with great difficulty. The Muslim army had suffered heavy casualties and in retaliation, the Sultan attacked the Christian king Baldon and defeated him. He captured the newly erected Fortress Jacob. The king was left with no other choice but to seek peace with the captors. The Sultan agreed to his plea for a settlement which was to be in effect for a period of two years.

During this entire time, a man called Reginald continued to scheme against the Muslims. He married the widows of different Christian nobles at various instances and gained prominence. He launched skirmishes on the borders of Antakia and Kurk. He would spread mass terror by attacking the suburban towns of Kurk on a regular basis. He would plunder the passing caravans of pilgrims on the way to Makkah for Hajj, imprison women and children, and mercilessly kill innocent people. The Sultan complained of these horrific acts to Baldon several times, without resorting to aggression in view of the peace treaty. When these grievances were not addressed, Salahuddin was forced to take a bolder step. At the same time, the news started circulating about the sea and land forces that Reginald had mustered to fulfill his evil intentions towards Makkah and Madina – the holy places of Muslims. The Sultan wasted no time in sending a naval fleet from Egypt after the fleet of Reginald, while he sent his army from Syria to combat the land forces. The Christian militants had reached a place

called Rabigh when they were overcome by the Muslim forces and completely annihilated.

A year passed before Reginald gathered the nerve to muster another fleet in order to launch an offensive against Madina via the Sea of Qulzum. The Muslim Admiral Lou Lou chased the Christian naval armada and unnerved the soldiers who were terrified when they saw the Muslim fleet approaching. They descended on the shores of a town and tried to hide in the mountains. The Muslim navy pursued them and did not spare a single enemy; only Reginald managed to escape yet another time. On reaching Kurk, he once again got busy in preparing future militant activities.

This time the Sultan personally wanted to take to task the miscreant for casting evil glances towards Makkah and Madina. Along with his forces Salahuddin reached the fortress of Reginald. The soldiers of the enemy rushed into the fortress and pulled the drawbridge up so that no one could cross. The Muslim ranks besieged the fort and installed their tanks near the trenches. On the night of the attack a wedding was taking place within the fort between the Queen's sister Isabelle and a relative of Reginald's. The soft-hearted Sultan asked his brigade to avoid attacking the tower which housed the bridal couple. The siege continued for a month. The ruler of Tibriya, Raymond, reached the fortress with reinforcements. He contracted a peace agreement for five years with the Sultan. Contented, Salahuddin lifted the siege and returned.

Predictably, Reginald, true to his nature, started instigations against Muslims yet another time. He looted a large trading caravan which was passing through and imprisoned them. When the Sultan pressed for their release, he showed indifference and had the audacity to plunder yet another party of Hajj pilgrims. When the pilgrims appealed he asked them to call their Prophet Muhammad (SAW) for help. Then he

martyred a number of pilgrims.

All these alarming incidents were enough to galvanize the Sultan into action. This was the straw that broke the camel's back. His patience had been tested far too many times and he vowed to kill Reginald with his own hands.

In 1187 A.D. Sultan Salahuddin advanced with his forces towards Tibriya. The Christian ranks organized themselves at the springs of Safooriya. They did not want to leave their positions in order to engage in battle with the Sultan. The Sultan demonstrated brilliant military prowess and conquered Tibriya with ease. Also present in the city were Raymond's wife and children. This news caused furor among the Christian ranks. They were forced to advance and meet the Muslim army. They had to march the whole day in hot sultry weather, so at night they fell into a deep slumber.

To help our readers understand the events better it is important to explain that when the Christian king of Jerusalem Amori died, he left an ill and weak lad Baldon who was not capable of running the affairs of the state. The prevailing council therefore appointed Raymond, the governor of Tarablus, as his patron. Later on, except for a specific area of Jerusalem, Baldon handed over the entire state to his brother-in-law Guy. Tensions between Raymond and Guy continued for some time until the opposition of Muslims and the need to fight against them compelled the two to unite.

The next day both forces confronted each other in battle. When the battle commenced, the Christian soldiers advanced forward with their special cross which they believed was constructed from the same wood that was used to create the cross on which Jesus had been crucified. However, they could not stand the onslaught of the Muslim army. Their steps faltered, but the cross renewed their motivation to fight. They kept returning with renewed vigour, but not for long. The Muslim cavalry

fought aggressively and the enemy was forced to retreat. By night time, the Crusaders were exhausted. In the morning, the Muslim ranks wreaked havoc on them and most of the Christian army was killed on the battlefield. The rest were imprisoned. Only Raymond was able to escape with a small brigade.

This victory was so profound and absolute that it broke the back of the Crusading forces. The Christian army had suffered heavy casualties despite the use of heavy armour covering their whole bodies. It had been a daunting task for the Muslims. Not only did they have to first kill the horses forcing the riders to be thrown off but they had to then pierce through the iron vests that shielded the soldiers. Yet the prisoners were so many that 30 to 40 of them were tied by one rope and each Muslim soldier was expected to guard 100-200 prisoners.

After the victory, a court was summoned by the Sultan. All the prisoners were presented before him. The king of Jerusalem, Guy, was also present among them, along with his brother, Reginald and other important nobles. The king was trembling with fear. Salahuddin treated him respectfully when he saw his condition. He ordered cold water for the king, who drank a few sips and gave the rest to Reginald. The Sultan rebuked him for passing on the glass to Reginald and commented that he would not have done such a thing. Sultan Salahuddin meant that there would be no clemency shown to Reginald. This was the man who hated Muslims and Islam from the core of his heart. He was willing to go to any lengths to fulfill his mal-intent. Time and again he had made offensive remarks against the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Not once had he abided by the agreements that he had enacted with the Muslim nations. Now was the time for retribution. Nothing could stop the Sultan from fulfilling his intention. The Sultan reminded him of his insults in a thunderous tone, and proclaimed to be the one who would defend the honour of the Prophet (SAW). Then the criminal was asked his will regarding the acceptance of Islam. When

Reginald refused, the Sultan severed his head with his sword.

When King Guy saw the fate that his friend suffered, he panicked. He thought he was second in line for execution. But the Sultan reassured him by affirming that kings don't execute kings and that Reginald had crossed all bounds of propriety. He showed a similar attitude to the nobles who were taken as captives. All were shown clemency and were duly escorted to Damascus.

The Muslim army camped for just one day after the conquest of Hitin, a place close to Tibriya. Then they spread throughout the country like a flood. After the fall of Tibriya and Akka, 500 more destinations were conquered with ease. Most of these were acquired through peace agreements. The entire territory of Palestine, from Beirut in the north to Gaza in the south fell to the Muslims in a matter of two months. The Christians had taken almost a century to conquer the same but with much warfare and bloodshed. Now the only cities in their control were Jerusalem and Sur.

Bait ul Maqdas – The Jewel in the Crown

After numerous conquests, the time had come for the Sultan to conquer Jerusalem. This had been the greatest desire of the Sultan for a long time and the purpose of his life. For this last milestone, he tried to unite the Muslim governments of different countries.

The Sultan undertook large scale measures to prepare for the onslaught. The scholars and the intellectuals were asked to join the struggle. The Sultan started his journey in the name of Allah. At some distance form Bait ul Maqdas, Sultan Salahuddin rendered such an inspiring speech that he mesmerized the army and the nobles accompanying him. He vowed to fight till the end – till Bait ul Maqdas bore the flag of Islam; till he had followed in the footsteps of the Prophet

(SAW) and conquered the Dome of the Rock.

On the other side, 20,000 Crusaders were ready to battle inside the fortress. Queen Subul and Princess Isabelle had united after resolving their differences. The refugees from nearby conquered areas had also gathered in the fortress.

The Sultan reached Bait ul Maqdas on 15 Rajab in 583 Hijri and addressed the fortified Christians. He declared that this city was as holy to him as it was to them. He had not come here to shed blood. If they agreed to surrender the city to him without a fight, he would allow the Christians to carry on with their lives peacefully under a nominal tax system. This generous offer was rejected.

For the next five days, Salahuddin busied himself in organizing his armed forces. On Friday, the 20th of Rajab, he installed his catapults in strategic places and rearranged his archers. An attack was launched on the fortress and massive efforts were made to damage the thick fortified walls. The Muslim soldiers succeeded in making cracks in the fortress walls, whose foundations were weakened by putting burning cotton cloth into it. Thus the fearless Muslim army succeeded in entering the fortress amid a shower of arrows.

This brave entry and daring behaviour of the Muslim forces caused disorder and despair among the Christian ranks. They had no other choice but to surrender and appeal to the Sultan in the name of God; the same God on whose creation they had no mercy 91 years back. Sultan was not interested in gaining wealth or territory. Thus, he let the Christians leave the city peacefully on very easy terms.

The next day a strange sight was witnessed. A never-ending trail of men, women and children was peacefully making its way out of the city along with their entire belongings and weaponry. First to lead were the priests who carried the

treasures and jewels of the church with them. These ornaments and riches were so valuable that one could only guess their value. The next procession saw Queen Subul with her entire possessions and servants, restored to her pristine glory. The Sultan himself came to see her off. Some 10,000 poor citizens of Jerusalem could not afford to pay the tax that had been agreed to in the peace accord so the the generous Sultan offered to pay it himself.

Some women came wailing and mourning to the Sultan, begging him to release their men who had been taken prisoners in the Battle of Hitin and later skirmishes. They had no one to support them. Salahuddin, being tender-hearted, released their husbands, brothers and sons.

The Sultan's glance fell on some people who were carrying their old parents on their shoulders. He ordered the special Christian unit called Hospitlars to take care of the sick and wounded. Salahuddin respected the sentiments of the defeated inhabitants and did not enter the city till they had all departed.

It was a blessed Friday of 583 Hijri when Bait ul Maqdas fell to the Muslims after 91 years. The Sultan received congratulatory messages in his tent, his face radiant with happiness. The Qaris recited the Quran and the poets read out beautiful verses celebrating the event. Sultan Salahuddin composed more than 70 letters to heads of the Muslim states and other officials informing them of the victory Allah had granted them. The longest letter was written to the Caliph in Baghdad.

Bait ul Maqdas had undergone a massive transformation over the century. There were statues and figurative drawings on the walls which had erased the whole concept of the Oneness of Allah. The Dome of the Rock had been hidden by slabs of marble. The Muslims were sorrowful at witnessing this state of the mosque. The Sultan renovated the mosque and had it restored to its pristine glory. On his orders the mosque was

washed with rose water, and decorated for the congregational prayer. The next Friday was a day of jubilation and a demonstration of the power and prestige for the Muslim world. The mosque was filled to capacity with worshippers. The Sultan beckoned Qazi Muhiyuddin to deliver the Friday sermon. The Qazi mentioned the historical background and significance of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and thanked Allah for the decisive victory over the Christians. His words were so poignant and soulful that the entire congregation wept with emotion. Then the beautiful and expensive pulpit that Nooruddin Zangi had especially built 23 years back for his desired victory over Bait ul Maqdas was fitted into place. Unfortunately he died without seeing his dream fulfilled; instead Allah blessed his successor Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi with this ultimate triumph.

After the conquest of Bait ul Maqdas, Sultan Salahuddin turned his attention to Tartoos and Antakia. In both cases, he remained triumphant. According to Herald Lamb, "Salahuddin conquered Antakia with the ease of a farmer harvesting a ripe crop."

In the month of Ramadan that year, the Sultan carried on with his jihad activities and managed to capture the famous fort in Kurk where Reginald had sought refuge and which had become the launching pad of his sinister advances towards Muslims. Then, Salahuddin returned to Bait ul Maqdas and spent the rest of Ramadan in worship there.

The Third Crusade

When the news of Salahuddin's expeditions and conquests of Christian holds reached Europe, there was an uproar and a wave of anger rose up against the Muslims. King Guy, the former king of Jerusalem, who had been pardoned and freed by the Sultan earlier, now went back on his word, and started to amass an army along with volunteers. He started preparations against the might of Salahuddin. The Christian forces laid siege to the city of Akka. This was the start of a series of battles called The

Third Crusade. The events are presented below in brief.

When the Sultan reached Akka with his forces, the city was already under siege. Salahuddin positioned his soldiers around the Christian army. The city was surrounded by the Christians while they were surrounded by the Muslims. There were regular skirmishes between the two forces. One day the Crusaders launched a surprisingly mighty assault on the Sultan's army which could not bear the strength of the attack and many including leading military officials were martyred on the Muslim side. However, the Muslim forces stabilized and reassembled themselves. Now the tables were turned and the Crusaders lost close to ten thousand soldiers. The stench and atrophied bodies gave rise to a plague; the Sultan had to retreat with his men for a while.

In the next phase the inhabitants of Akka were engulfed in a new difficulty. The Crusaders made tower like structures and stepladders (made of fire proof material) higher than the walls of the city. Their catapults were positioned on these towers. Whosoever stepped in their line of fire was not spared. The Muslims had to look for a quick solution. An engineer from Damascus had an ingenious idea. He prepared a special explosive which when hurled at the ladders set fire to them. Hence this strategic weapon of the enemy was rendered incapable.

The residents of Akka and the Sultan's army were rejoicing at this success when they received the news that the kings of Europe, including Germany's Frederick, France's Philip and England's Richard, are marching towards them with their armies. Salahuddin pondered over the situation and sought help from the Muslim rulers. However, none came forward and he could only rely on military succour from his own empire. Inspite of the Sultan's smaller army,, the Crusaders were defeated comprehensively in the next few battles by the grace of

Allah. Also, there were reports that the old German king who was coming to fight against the Sultan had died by drowning. His armed forces disintegrated and most of the soldiers returned to their homeland.

The next challenge was posed by the French King Philip who had marched forward with an army. The city of Akka had now been under siege for about a year. Fresh battalions added strength to the Christian army. Once again a battle ensued. The Sultan's army and the citizens of Akka fought bravely and crushed the force of the French Crusaders. This provided some relief to the Muslim camps. However, it proved short-lived and was followed by a mighty force led by King Richard of England. This was the same Richard who is called Richard the Lionheart in the annals of history because of his feats of bravery. Philip and Richard were not on common ground and did not share a harmonious relationship. Philip lost hope after being defeated at the hands of the Muslims and returned. However, he left behind most of his forces for combat in Akka.

The fresh reinforcements brought by Richard succeeded in weakening the fortified wall around the city of Akka. The citizens of the city were almost starved but still continued to fill the gaps made in the walls. They constantly heaved fireballs at the Crusaders to make them retreat. The Sultan was fighting one army after the other. The Crusaders were badly routed in most cases. But now a plague and famine in the city forced the dwellers to request a settlement with the invaders. After a long period of three years, the Christian army managed to take over the city of Akka. For this, they had to sacrifice the lives of one hundred and twenty thousand soldiers.

Many bloody battles took place between Richard and Salahuddin. In most of the battles, Richard suffered a heavy defeat. But he was so brave and undeterred that his soldiers would be constantly inspired by his courage and kept on

returning to fight. Nothing would faze the European King. He made a plan to conquer Asqalan. When the Sultan got news of his intentions, he swiftly reached Asqalan first and evacuated the city. He overwhelmed the Crusaders and left King Richard stunned by his rapid advances. The king was now under the awe of the Sultan. His men were tired and worn out from the long drawn battles. Another report that worried the king was that of his brother securing the royal treasury in England. With these troubling circumstances back home, and the Sultan's determination on the other, Richard thought of returning to his country. As a last endeavor, he attempted to seize Bait ul Maqdas, but the Sultan had made prior arrangements to defend the city. The Christian army panicked and could not lay siege to the holy city. Instead, they retreated towards Ramallah. The Sultan's army hastened towards Jafa and captured it. Unfortunately there arose some differences between the Muslim ranks, and King Richard, taking advantage of the situation, managed to take Jafa back into his hold.

Now Richard and his army strongly desired to return to their homeland. Hence, peace terms were negotiated with the Sultan which favoured the Muslims. The area from Akka to Jafa remained under the command of the Christians. Richard and his soldiers marched back and in this way the third Crusade came to an end.

Death

After the peace treaty of Ramallah, Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi returned to Damascus and busied himself with affairs of the state. He made the intention for Hajj but was unable to carry out his plans. The Hajj season passed and the pilgrims started to return. The Sultan came out to welcome them in bitterly cold weather without appropriate clothing. He caught a severe cold and fell very ill. When people found out about his ailment, they began to pray for his recovery.

On the twelfth day of his illness, the Sultan spent a restless night during which he constantly listened to the recitation of the Quran. When the last verse of Surah Taubah was being recited ('*There is no god but Allah, I trust in Him only*'), Sultan Salahuddin's face broke out in a smile. He lifted the finger of Shahadah (index finger as in salah) and passed away. He was 55 years of age at the time of his death.

The news of Salahuddin's death hit the Muslim world like a tornado. The Muslim Ummah went into mourning at this great loss. The expenses for the death shroud were met by Qazi Fazil. The Muslims were overwhelmed with grief and some even fainted from weeping. The funeral prayer was carried out with great difficulty as the procession was in a state of anguish. With tears and prayers of forgiveness for their leader the grieving mourners bade the Sultan farewell on 13th March, 1193 A.D. in the Islamic month of Safar. Salahuddin was buried in the fort of Damascus along with his sword.

A Character Sketch of the Sultan

The great success story of Sultan Salahuddin can be attributed to Allah's special blessings on him. He possessed numerous noble qualities. The Sultan was a true Mujahid and the spirit of Jihad coursed through his veins. In the interest of Jihad, he said goodbye to the material world. In the words of Ibn Shidaad:

"I wrote a book on Jihad on the request of the Sultan, which was a compilation of verses from the Quran and Ahadith about the topic. The Sultan would constantly browse through this book. No amount of effort for his cause would tire him out. No expedition proved too much for him. Whether forging on in the stinging cold nights of winter, or weathering storms in the desert, nothing fazed the Sultan. When he attacked the fort of Safdar, the days were bitterly cold, the rain was intense and rapid floods were engulfing the encampment. It was difficult for the armed forces to move through the slithery mud.

Salahuddin, undeterred by the extremities of weather, stayed vigilant the entire night, and set up the catapults in strategic positions.

Similarly, during the war on Ramallah, skirmishes would erupt during the night. The tents of the Sultan and the soldiers would collapse because of the harsh wind and they would spend the entire night on horseback. Salahuddin would be so busy in handling the war issues and strategies that he would often forget to eat, drink or rest. He would be oblivious to illness and pain. He was very sick during the siege of Akka. This was the time when mighty European armies were positioned against him. The Sultan had painful sores on the lower part of his body. He could neither sit up nor lie down. In this condition he would go around organizing and motivating his forces without any hint of anguish on his face. On being questioned he commented that he was oblivious to his physical problems on horseback, but when he got off his suffering resurfaced."

1. The Spirit of Forgiveness

Generally speaking, harsh experiences in life make a person hard-hearted and callous. But Sultan Salahuddin had an extremely kind heart. He was benevolent to his subjects and to all creatures of Allah, unlike the Christian leaders who had roasted bodies of Muslim prisoners of war on skewers. The Sultan was not hungry for power or territory, nor was he filled with the fire of revenge that would make him resort to torture or cruelty. Whenever he would conquer a city, he would let the Christian citizens leave unharmed rather than kill them mercilessly. Even though he was well aware and it was his experience that the same people that he was releasing would come back to fight against him. Still, there was no change in his compassionate policies towards his defeated enemies. His words to his son give us an indication of his intent. He advised him to always fear and avoid bloodshed as blood never goes to

waste (i.e. killings always have reactions and after effects).

Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi was a principled ruler who never resorted to unfair practices for meeting his objectives. The Christian kings often went back on their agreements but the Sultan never followed suit. He always stuck to his side of the bargain, showing restraint, dealing patiently and in a dignified manner.

2. Generosity and Benevolence

The benevolence of Salahuddin is worth mentioning and well-known. After the conquest of Bait ul Maqdas, he generously distributed riches among the poor from the treasury. An adviser rebuked him for emptying the royal treasury for this wealth could have lasted a long time. The Sultan replied that he felt more comfortable in giving away money and riches that were not his own anyway. It belonged to the needy. He felt delighted in returning the rights to all who claimed them. When he would be involved in donating to the underprivileged, his face would radiate happiness. The treasurers would secretly put away some money for future emergencies, for they knew that the Sultan would distribute all the resources instantly. The one who gave so generously with both hands lived an extremely simple existence. At the time of his death, he owned just 47 dirhams and one dinar. All his life he never paid zakat because no significant amount was ever collected by him to enable him to pay it.

Salahuddin's deeds matched his words. He once said that there should be some people who consider wealth to be as flimsy as dust. Once he was taken to see a fine palace in Damascus that had been specially constructed for him. The Sultan was displeased with the endeavour and claimed that they would not live forever and that the palace was not suitable for someone who awaited death. He further commented that our purpose was to worship Allah. His practical life was a demonstration of

his beliefs and values. His tent was his palace, and the horseback was his throne.

3. Simplicity and Moderation

In his personal life, the Sultan did not care for decorum and royal etiquette. He was simple, egalitarian and undemanding to the extreme. Once in the battle of Akka he generously gifted 12,000 horses to his soldiers on their appeal. During the battle, the Sultan was seen requesting for a mount to fight on. Because of his easy-going temperament, his servants would often take him for granted and misbehave on occasions. One day, the Sultan had to request his servant for a glass of water five times. He exclaimed that he would die of thirst. Finally the insolent servant brought the water. The patient monarch drank the water silently without rebuking the man.

Once Salahuddin fell seriously ill and became very weak. He asked for water which was too hot when it was brought. The Sultan again requested for cold water but this time too he was presented with warm water. The Sultan remained silent. When this happened a third time, the Sultan simply asked the servant to tell him if he wanted to kill him.

4. Behaviour in Public Life

Sultan Salahuddin's public life is worth mentioning. He was polite and refined in conversation. His court was open to comments from all quarters. However, vulgar obscenities and personal insults were not tolerated. Even in a state of anger, the Sultan had his tongue and pen in check. The Sultan would enjoy the company of learned men and scholars. Among his favourite companions were the two celebrated scholars, Qazi Fazil and Sheikh Bahauddin.

Sultan Salahuddin was very particular about his Islamic duties. Unfortunately he could not perform Hajj despite his best efforts.

However, he did his utmost for the welfare of the pilgrims and always stood ready to welcome them on their return.

The Sultan would weep profusely while listening to the recitation from the Quran. This was the same monarch who patiently bore the vicissitudes of life. In the thick of battle, when he received the news of his son's death, he did not let anyone know of his sorrow till the battle had come to an end. It must have been a difficult test as he was an extremely loving and caring father.

5. Sense of Justice

Sultan Salahuddin was not only remarkable for his personal qualities and his mighty prowess as a general, but he was also known for his wise and just governance. He was very strict in the administration of justice. The judges in his courts were not allowed to show undue leniency to any man, whatever his religion or status. If a case was registered against him or his family, they would appear in the court as ordinary citizens for the hearing. If the Sultan would emerge victorious in any case, he would bear the expenses of the accuser and award him a royal robe to please him.

Conclusion

The Ayyubi era was known for its educational and scholarly progress. Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi had a passion for establishing Islamic schools and this fervor passed on to his successors. He introduced a scheme through which special estates were dedicated (waqf) for the running of these centres of learning. In a matter of years, the Muslim empire abounded with libraries and seminaries.

The Sultan had so many amazing qualities that one doesn't have the words to express them. Today we see the Muslim world engulfed in a similar situation as was the case in Sultan's era.

One by one, the West is gaining control of Muslim countries. The Muslim Ummah is despairing and lacking in confidence. After World War Two, when the British forces had taken over the control of Bait ul Maqdas, a British general kicked the grave of Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi and mocked, “Rise up Salahuddin, and see that we have reached here.” The Islamic world eagerly awaits a Mujahid like Salahuddin. In the words of Allama Iqbal:

‘No Rumi stood up again from the gardens of Ajam (non-Arab world), though it is the same water and soil of Iran and the same Tibriz’.

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