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Chapter 10: At the Time of al-Mehdi

The Islamic world received the government of al-Mehdi with more joys and delights. That is because of what it had met during the time of al-Mansur such as severity, strictness, and tyranny in the governing they ended with his death. For al-Mehdi was more tractable than his father and was famous for generosity, open-handedness, refraining from severity and rudeness.

When al-Mehdi ascended the throne, he issued a royal decree to release all the political detainees and prisoners except those killers and mischief-makers. He also returned the movable and the immovable properties his father unjustly and aggressively confiscated to their owners. He returned to Imam Musa what his father had taken from Imam al-Sadiq, peace be on him. The reason for that is that he undertook the kingdom that led a life of stability and tranquility.

Besides he received the great wealth his father had collected while he was stingy toward himself and the community; so neither he nor it enjoyed the blessings of that great wealth. Unfortunately, al-Mehdi spent that great wealth on amusement, dissoluteness, gifts to the hirelings and the dissolute.

The weak class did not make use of it, for he did not give anything of it, and for he had no concern except satisfying his pleasures and going too far in lavish expenditure, luxury, and dissoluteness.

Any way al-Mehdi cannot be compared to his father, for he was contrary to him in most his qualities and deeds, but he inherited from his father an intense enmity toward the 'Alawids and their followers, for he detested them very much.

He inherited that from his father al-Mansur, thought that he would not last in undertaking the government and authority except through destroying the 'Alawids and their followers. In the following we will deal with some of his qualities and his deeds and what Imam Musa, peace be on him, met during his time.

His Dissoluteness

The Islamic Caliphate is the shadow of Allah on earth; therefore, it was necessary for it to represent the objectives, reality, and guidance of Islam; and it was necessary for it to be kept from futility and temptations, and to be far above amusement and dissoluteness. Any way it has not reported that many of the Umayyad and the 'Abbasid rulers were far away from the abominable things and amusement were forbidden by Allah.

For they turned the Islamic caliphate into theaters for dance, pleasure, and corruption. If they had taken off the garment of the caliphate, they would have preserve Islam and kept its ideals.

Amusement, dissoluteness, liquidity, and corruption spread among the people during the time of al-Mehdi. Bashshar's poems circulated; the people memorized his love poetry. The honorable and the enthusiastic were displeased with that. An example of that is that Yazid b. Mansur came in to al-Mehdi and asked him to stop Bashshar and to prevent him from writing love poetry, and al-Mehdi summoned him and prohibited him from that.

In this respect Bashshar says:

I lived among plants of sweet-basil, wine, and flowers under the protection of a good gathering.

I filled the land among Faghfor, 1 al-Qayrawan, and the Yemen with poetry to which the people pray just as the errant pray to an idol.

Then al-Mehdi prevented me from that, so my soul turned away (from that) due to the good deed of the successful one who quickly understands.

Therefore, praise belongs to Allah with Whom there is no partner, nothing will stay forever.

Yet Bashshar secretly went on composing love poetry and practicing dissoluteness.

In this respect he says:

I have seen a good view of a slave girl's face, and I ransomed it.

She sent for me to offer for sale the garment of youth while I had folded it.

By Allah, the Lord of Muhammad, I did not betray, nor did I intend (to betray).

I refrained from it; perhaps accidentally tribulation came, and I did not seek it.

Surely the Caliph refused (it); when he refuses a thing, I also refuse it.

The gallant King prevented me from the women and I did not oppose him.

Rather, I was loyal and broke neither covenant nor promise.

It is I who is towering over the enemies; and when praise is expensive, I will buy it.

I incline to the amusement of the drinking companion though I feel no appetite for it.

The lover's house fills me with longing when I leave in the early morning.

The Caliph has prevented me from (going to her) though I have not hated her.

Bashshar has also said:

I have buried love, so I will not visit neither Sulama nor Saffra' as long as the turtle dove cooks.

I have left the communication with her for the sake of the Mehdi of mankind and conformed to the covenant between us, which is not betrayal.

Were it not for Muhammad (al-Mehdi), I would kiss her on the mouth or I would break my fast through her.

By my life, a sin has burdened my own soul, so I do not want to commit sin by sin.2

Al-Mehdi straitened Bashshar in the beginning, and then he released him. Then a current of dissoluteness and prostitution carried Bashshar away. He is regarded as the first to establish the amusement during the 'Abbasid government. Al-Jahiz says: "In the first place, Bashshar veiled himself from the singers, and then he said: 'Pleasure is in witnessing joy through approaching him who delights me; there is neither good nor pleasure in keeping away (from him)."3

He (al-Mehdi) was informed of the voice of Ibrahim al-Mousili and his good songs, so he brought him near to him and promoted his position. 4 When he practiced dissoluteness and amusement, the people had suspicions about him and accused him of different accusations; to this meaning Bashshar b. Burd al-'Uqayli refers when he satirized him:

The Caliph fornicates his aunts, plays with the tambourine and the scepter.

May Allah replace him by other than him and put Musa into the heat of the canes.5

Al-Jahiz mentioned that al-Mehdi loved songstresses and hearing songs, that he was fond of a slave girl called Jawher whom he bought, and that he composed poetry on her. 6 He was fond of drinking wine, to the extent that his minister Ya'qub b. Dawud prohibited him from that, saying to him: "Do you do that after performing prayers in Mesjid?"

However, he paid no attention to his advice and took the advice of some dissolute poets who recommended him to continue drinking wine and not to pay attention to his minister's speech, saying:

Put Ya'qub b. Dawud aside and drink sweet-smelling wine!7

Al-Mehdi gave free rein to his desires, his pleasures, and his dissoluteness, to the extent that his son Ibrahim and his daughter 'Aliyya inherited that from him. Accordingly Ibrahim was the head of the singers, and 'Aliya was on top of the songstresses and the musicians in Baghdad.

His Lavish Expenditure and Extravagance

Al-Mehdi spent on his sensual desires all the great properties al-Mansur had plundered from the Muslims and left behind. He spent them on pleasures and dissoluteness and left the community suffer from poverty and misery. He spent lavishly to the extent that he made the people astonished with him.

An example of his lavish expenditure and extravagance was that when he married his son to Mrs. Zubayda. He celebrated a great festival and spent fifty million dirhams of the properties of the Muslims. He held the festival in the Palace of al-Khuld on the bank of the Tigris. He invited the people from all the cities before some months. They hurried to him and indulged in the hope of attaining enormous properties.

They stopped at al-Mehdi as guests. Al-Mehdi had ordered various kinds of furniture to be brought. Examples of that are gold and silver containers, Armenia excellent carpets and rugs the 'Abbasids took from the Umayyad government. Those carpets and rugs were of the possessions of al-Walid b. Yazid, who was fond of them, for he decorated the floor and the walls of his palace; they were the most excellent things given as presents to the caliphs.

Concerning them, Marco Polo, the explorer, has said: "The eye has seen nothing more beautiful and better than them." Al-Mehdi also ordered clothes brocaded with gold, perfume of different kinds, boxes full of jewels, precious ornaments, maids, retainers, and boys to be brought.

On the night of the wedding, Zubayda was clothed in a shirt brocaded with great pearls the like of which none had ever seen and whose value none could estimate, for it was very precious. He ordered her to be clothed in the budna of the wife of Hisham b. 'Abd al-Malik; the budna is a shirt; most of it is made of gold; it consists of only two Awkeias (127 gram); and the rest of it is gold.

Then he ordered her to be adorned with ornaments, to the extent that she was unable to walk due to the many jewels she wore. Mitz says: "Neither the Persian kings, nor the Roman Caesar, nor the western kings had practiced such a thing."

The Hashimite women came, and they were given a garment brocaded with gold, a bag full of dinars, and a vessel full of silver. The retainers filled the gold containers with dirhams and the silver containers with dinars and gave them to the notables; they added to that perfume of musk and ambergris.8

In his book al-Diyarat, al-Shabishty has mentioned: "When al-Mehdi married his son to his niece Um

Ja'far, he prepared for her furniture, boxes full of jewels, ornaments, crowns, wreaths, gold and silver domes, and perfumes. Then he ordered the budna of 'Abda, Hisham's wife to be given to her."

He (al-Shabishty) added: "The like of the budna and of the beads that were in it had never been seen in Islam. There were two lines of ruby on the front and the back of it; and the rest of it was decorated with great pearls the like of which was not available." It was said that the estimators were unable to estimate these pearls because they were very expensive. 10

This is an example of the lavish expenditure and of making light of the Muslims' properties of which Islam took great care and required (the rulers) to spend them on public interests, and made it forbidden for them to choose any of them. Yet another example of al-Mehdi's lavish expenditure is that he bought a very precious gem of ruby for three hundred thousand dinars.

The money was in bags. When they were put one on another, they became like a mountain. When al-Mehdi received it, he gave it to his son al-Hadi. 11 Through these examples we can understand his lavish expenditure and extravagance. Who could at that time criticize the Caliph and say to him that those properties belonged to the community and he had no share of it, nor had he the right to dispose of them?

The Influence of Woman

According to her nature, woman follows the sentiments that achieve her desires, so how is it correct for them to dispose of the affairs of society? Al-Saffah and al-Mansur felt that, and they did not allow woman to enter the political affairs. Any way, when al-Mehdi undertook the office of the caliphate, the woman had an influence in it.

An example of that is that his wife al-Khayzaran had an authority and a strong influence on the palace, the drinking companions, the chamberlains, the doctors, and the like; she brought near whomever she pleased and sent far whomever she pleased.

For example, she harassed Bakhtshiyu' b. Jorjis, a famous doctor, and she forced al-Mehdi to return him to Jind Nisabur. 12 Since that day the influence of the women increased and became strong, to the extent that it reached zenith in the middle and end of the 'Abbasid state; this affair led to disorders and instability among the people.

Bribe and Oppression

Al-Mehdi occupied himself with amusement and pleasures, so he neglected the affairs of his subjects. Accordingly, his wicked governors plundered properties and striped the people of their wealth. Bribe greatly spread among all the officials, especially as it concerns Egypt.

For its governor was Musa, who went too far in collecting land taxes. He doubled it on the crop of each

feddan. Besides he imposed land taxes on the owners of shops in markets and of cattle. He took bribe in respect with laws. To this meaning the poet refers in his saying:

If al-Mehdi came to know of what Musa and Ayyub did in Egypt when they inhabited it, he would not accuse Ya'qub of advice. 13 Al-Mehdi himself intentionally wronged the people and unjustly behaved toward their rights. He ordered taxes and wages to be imposed on the markets in Baghdad. 14

He exerted intense pressure on the citizens. The people on whom land taxes were imposed met strictness and torture to the extent that there is no way to describe it. 15 If someone raised his voice to complain of (taxes) or to seek help (from the ruler), he would be sent to graves or to prisons.

His Taking care of the Fabricators

Al-Mehdi brought near a bad group of religious scholars whose minds were not educated by the teachings of the religion, so they supported the oppressive and gave them good nicknames and noble attributes, that they might seek nearness to them and crave for their world. They neglected the Islamic ideals, so they followed greed and avarice, and strove for material. They abased themselves before the kings and the sultans, so they encompassed them with a halo of sanctification and magnification. They told the community that the kings and the sultans represented the will of Allah and that they were far above errors. It is these fabricators who destroy Islam and distort its principal features.

Al-Mehdi brought near a group of such slaves, and they wrote false things in elegant style and fabricated lies on praising and lauding al-Mehdi. Examples of them are Abu Ma'shar al-Sindi, who was the most lying person under the sky;16 and Ghayyath b. Ibrahim, who came to know that al-Mehdi was fond of doves and loved them.

So he related to him on the authority of Abu Hurayra that he said: "There is no precedence except through a hoof or a spearhead or a wing!"

So al-Mehdi ordered ten thousand dirhams to be given to him for his fabricating the tradition. When Ghayyath went away from al-Mehdi, he said to those sitting with him: "I bear witness that he fabricated (a tradition) against Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family. Allah's Apostle did not say that, but he (Ghayyath) intended to seek nearness to me." 17

Although al-Mehdi came to know that Ghayyath fabricated (a tradition) against Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, he gave him an amount of money as a gift. In this manner he encouraged the movement of fabricating traditions and spared no effort to develop it, while it was the most dangerous disaster with which Islam was afflicted, for it degraded its importance and entered many fables into it.

We will mention that in a much more explanation when we talk about the problems at the time of the Imam.

His Showing Enmity toward the 'Alawids

Al-Mehdi inherited from his father an intense enmity toward the 'Alawids and their followers, so he was full of malice and hatred toward them. The reason for that is that the 'Abbasids had no right in undertaking the government, for the revolt against the Umayyad government was declared for the sake of the 'Alawids, the defenders of the truth and justice in Islam.

The revolt had the nature and reality of Shi'ism, for the revolutionaries adopted it as a slogan for them, and they struggled for it. For this reason the 'Abbasids joined the summons. The proof of that is that al-Mehdi came in to Abu 'Awn, who was the dearest of his companions to him and the most preferable of them to him, to visit him. Al-Mehdi asked him to mention his needs, that he might grant them. Abu 'Awn said to him:

- -My need is that I want you to be pleased with my son 'Abd Allah, for your anger toward him has lasted for a long time.
- -O Abu 'Abd Allah, your son has not followed our way, and he is contrary to your and our opinions. He criticizes the two Shaykhs (i.e. Abu Bakr and 'Umar) and says bad words against them.
- -By Allah, O Commander of the faithful, he is still following the affair for which we went out in revolt (against the Umayyads) and summoned (the people) to it. If you have changed your mind, then command us to follow what you like, that we may obey you. 18

This statement indicates that the revolt against the Umayyad government was Shi'ite in the full sense of the word. Yet there is another example indicating that: Al-Qasim b. Mujashi' sent his will to al-Mehdi, that he might bear witness for it, in it he mentioned:

"Allah bears witness that there is no god but He, and (so do) the angels and those possessed of knowledge, maintaining his creation with justice; there is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise. Surely the religion with Allah is Islam. (3:18)

I bear witness for that; and I testify that Muhammad is His Servant and His Apostle, and that 'Ali b. Abi Talib, was the testamentary trustee of Allah's Apostle, May Allah bless him and his family and inheritor of the Imamate after him."

When al-Mehdi read the last statement of the will, he threw it away and did not read the rest of it. 19 A special group of the 'Abbasids believed in that and firmly believed that the revolt was declared for Shi'ism. However, the 'Abbasids who usurped the government deviated from that for their own ambitions and for their ascending the throne.

Any way, al-Mehdi harbored intense malice against the 'Alawids.

As for the aspects of that enmity, they are as follows:

His spending a lot of Money on disparaging the 'Alawids

Al-Mehdi spent enormous amount of money on disparaging Ahl al-Bayt and on degrading their importance. Some hireling poets came to know that the way to get rich was through disparaging Ahl al-Bayt and going too far in dispraising them, so they fabricated lies in order to satirize them.

Among such slave poets was Bashshar b. Burd, who was famous for unbelief and atheism. He came in to al-Mehdi and recited to him his poem in which he said: O Son of him who inherited the Prophet Muhammad excluding the womb relatives.

The Revelation has stopped the dispute between the children of the daughters and you, so it is too late to dispute. Women have no religious duty along with men; concerning that Surat al-An'am has been revealed. How is, and that is not, that the children of the daughters inherit the uncles?20

So al-Mehdi gave him seventy thousand dirhams for that to encourage him and those dishonest other than him to disparage Ahl al-Bayt. When Imam Musa, peace be on him, heard of Bashshar's poem, he was very displeased and spent that night upset and in pain. He heard someone reciting to him poetry lines contrary to that of Bashshar, saying:

How is it, and it is not, that the polytheists are the pillars of Islam?

The children of the daughters have their share of their grandfather, whereas the uncle is left without share.

There is no relationship between the released one and the inheritance; the released one prostrated out of fear of the sword.

Ibn Shullah remained stopping and puzzled by it, and the womb relatives prevent him (from that).

Surely Fatima's son, whose name is mentioned, attained the inheritance excluding the cousins.21

When al-Mehdi spread disparaging Ahl al-Bayt, some poets began seeking nearness to him through satirizing them. Among them was Merwan b. Abi Hafs,

Who recited before him this poem in which he said:

Do you want to cover the stars and the moon of the sky with your hands?

Or do you refute a statement from your Lord Gabriel conveyed to the Prophet, and he said it?

The last verse in (Surat) al-Anfal bears witness for their inheritance, while you want to abolish it.

When al-Mehdi heard that, he crept from his place of praying and sat on the rug. He did not control

himself, so he said to him:

- -How many poetry lines does it (the poem) have?
- -A hundred lines.

He ordered a hundred thousand dirhams to be given to him, and he said to him: "This is the first time I give it to a poet during the caliphate of the 'Abbasids."22

Al-Mehdi granted these important properties in order to degrade the importance of Ahl al-Bayt. It is worth mentioning that he and the rest of his family did not assume the office of the Islamic caliphate except through the name, struggle, and sacrifices of the 'Alawids.

His distressing his Minster Ya'qub

Ya'qub b. Dawud had a great influence with al-Mehdi, to the extent that he was loyal to him in love and taking part in all his affairs. He announced that in his official divan. Concerning that Muslim al-Khasir says:

Say to the Imam whose caliphate has come to gift him with a right not refused.

The best friend from whom you get help with piety is your brother in Allah, Ya'qub b. Dawud. Ya'qub overcame al-Mehdi on his affair, so all his affairs were in his hand, and he managed them as he wished.

Some of his friends harbored malice against him and envied him for that great influence, and they asked al-Mehdi to send him far from his office, but he did not accept that from them and refrained from responding to them. Those who envied him practiced various ways to send him far from his office. Al-Mehdi passed by a wall and saw a poetry line written on the wall:

What a generous man you are, O Mehdi! Were it not for that you had adopted Ya'qub b. Dawud!

But he paid no attention to this line and ordered to be written under it this statement: "In spite of the writer! Woe to his grandfather!"

When his enemies despaired of him, they begged the Umayyads and asked them to revolt (against the 'Abbasids). In this respect Bashshar says: Rise, O Umayyads! Your sleep has become long! Surely the Caliph is Ya'qub b. Dawud.

Your caliphate is lost; therefore look for the vicegerent of Allah between the flute and the lute.23

When al-Mehdi closed all the ways before his opponents, they followed another way through which they could remove his blessing and inflict a disaster on him. They said to al-Mehdi that Ya'qub inclined to the 'Alawids, that he was among their helpers and the summoners to them, that he was one of them when they revolted against his father, that he was the secretary of Ibrahim b. 'Abd Allah, that he and

Muhammad went in revolt against al-Mansur in Yethrib.

When al-Mehdi heard of these points, he fully changed his mind, and roamed in a current of suspicions and worries. So he decided to try Ya'qub and to know his real attitude. He ordered the floor of his palace to be covered with furniture brocaded with flowers. He also wore clothes brocaded with flowers.

He ordered a pretty slave girl to stand by him. Then he summoned Ya'qub to his palace. When Ya'qub came in, al-Mehdi showed delight and happiness, and gave him all that valuable furniture along with that beautiful slave girl. Then he asked him to kill an 'Alawid person. Ya'qub responded to that.

He took a strong oath to carry that out. Ya'qub along with the 'Alawid person and the slave girl went away. When he sat in his house, he talked with that 'Alawid, and he came to know that he was a perfect, ripe writer. The 'Alawid begged al-Mehdi through various ways to pardon him and to release him. He responded to him and gave him an amount of money to seek help through it against his time and his ordeal. The slave girl whom al-Mehdi gave to Ya'qub as a gift was a spy on him.

So she went to al-Mehdi and told him fully about the talk. Accordingly, al-Mehdi sent policemen and spies to arrest the 'Alawid, and they arrested him. When they brought him to al-Mehdi, he ordered him to be hidden. Then he ordered Ya'qub to be brought. When he stood before him, he asked him about the 'Alawid, and he told him that he had executed him.

Al-Mehdi asked him:

-Is he dead?

-Yes.

Then al-Mehdi commanded him to put his hand on his head and to swear by Allah, and he did that. He said to a retainer of his: "Bring him who is in the house!"

When Ya'qub saw the 'Alawid, he became bewildered and was not able to say any word. As a result al-Mehdi said to him: "Now, it is lawful for me to shed your blood! If I prefer to shed it, I will shed it!" Then he ordered him to be imprisoned forever in an underground prison (al-Mattbaq), and all his properties to be confiscated.

Ya'qub remained in prison until the caliphate of al-Rashid. Then Khalid b. Yehya al-Barmaki interceded with al-Rashid for Ya'qub, and he pardoned him. He came out of prison, while he was emaciated, blind, and subservient. 24 This attitude is a proof of that al-Mehdi harbored malice against the 'Alawids and their Shi'ites (followers).

With Imam Musa

In the beginning of his government, al-Mehdi did not harass Imam Musa. He did not subject him to detested things, nor did he treat him badly. Instead of severe punishment, he thought that it was sufficient for him to put him under an intense supervision.

When the fame of the Imam spread among the circles, al-Mehdi did not control his anger, and he intentionally ordered him to be arrested. However, he quickly released him, for he saw a proof from his Lord, just as we will mention.

We will deal with some attitudes that happened to the Imam along with explaining his arrest.

His giving a Proof of that Wine is forbidden

Al-Mehdi made a pilgrimage to the Sacred House of Allah. When he had finished the rites of the hajj, he went to visit the grave of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family. He spent enormous amounts of money on the people of Medina. The Imam met with him. When he sat down, al-Mehdi asked him the following question:

- -Is wine forbidden in the Book of Allah? The people know wine but they do not know that it is forbidden.
- -Yes. It is forbidden in the Book of Allah.
- -In which place is it forbidden?
- -In the words of Allah, the Great and Almighty: Say: My Lord has only prohibited indecencies, those of them that apparent as well as those that are concealed, and sin and rebellion without justice. Then he, peace be on him, explained to him the meanings of the verse, saying:

As for His words: *those of them that apparent*, meaning open fornication and the flags the prostitutes hoisted in the pre–Islamic period. As for His words: *as well as those that are concealed,* meaning the women whom fathers married. This concerns the people before the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family.

If a man had a wife and died, his son married her if she was not his mother, so Allah prohibited that. As for the sin, meaning wine itself, for Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, says in another place: *They ask you about intoxicants and games of chance. Say: In both of them there is a great sin and means of profit for men.* So the sin in the Book of Allah is wine and games of chance, and in both of them there is a great sin.

Al-Mehdi admired the Imam and turned to 'Ali b. Yaqtin and said to him:

-By Allah, this is a Hashimi religious verdict.

-By Allah, you are truthful, O Commander of the faithful, praise belongs to Allah, Who has not made this knowledge come out of you, O household! Ibn Yaqtin hurt al-Mehdi with these words, and he said to him: "You are truthful, O Rafidite!"25

The Borders of Fadak

When al-Mehdi decided to return the confiscated properties to their owner, Imam Musa, peace be on him, came in to him. He saw him busy with that, so he turned to him and asked him:

- -Why is our confiscated property not returned to us?
- -What is it, O Abu al-Hasan?
- -Fadak.
- -Determine its boundaries to me.
- -Its boundaries are: Jabal Uhd, Arish Masr, Sayf al-Bahr, and Domat al-Jandal.
- -Are all these the boundaries of Fadak?
- -Yes.

Al-Mehdi's face turned yellow and angry appeared on his facial expressions. Thus, he said: "This is too much! I will try it!"26

His widening al-Mesjid al-Haram

Al-Mehdi ordered the Holy Mosque in Mecca (al-Mesjid al-Haram) to be enlarged along with the Mesjid of the Prophet. That was in the year 161 A. H.27 The owner of the houses neighboring to the two Mesjids refrained from selling them to the government. Accordingly, al-Mehdi asked the jurists of his time whether it was possible for him to force them to do that.

In his gathering was 'Ali b. Yaqtin, who advised him to ask Imam Musa, peace be on him, about that. He regarded his opinion as correct and wrote a letter to his governor over Yethrib (Medina) to ask the Imam about that. When the letter reached him, he went to the Imam and questioned him, and he wrote an answer as follows:

"If the Kaaba has occupied (the houses of) the people, then the people are worthier (than it) of its building; and if the people have occupied the courtyard of the Kaaba, then the Kaaba is more entitled (than them to regain) its courtyard."

When al-Mehdi received the answer, he ordered the houses to be demolished and added to the courtyard of the two Mesjids. The owner of the houses restored to Imam Musa and asked him to write

them a letter to al-Mehdi concerning that, that he might give them money in exchange for their house. He responded to them and wrote al-Mehdi a letter concerning that.

When al-Mehdi received the letter, he gave them gifts and pleased them. 28 This is not a kind of the appropriation which is nowadays called Public Interest Appropriation just as it has been understood by some contemporaries. Rather, this is a religious decision that follows its special proofs that say that the Jami' (mosque) has a courtyard, and that it is not forbidden to demolish the house of him who occupies it.

Al-Muhaddith, al-Hafiz Abu al-Khattab ascribed the story to Imam al-Sadiq, peace be on him, with al-Mansur. 29 That is impossible, for history has mentioned that al-Mansur did not achieve any constructional movement.

Imam Musa is arrested

When the Imam's fame and name spread all over the cities, al-Mehdi became angry with and harbored malice against him. Al-Mehdi had fear for his throne and thought that his kingdom would not be stable except through arresting the Imam. So he wrote a letter to his governor over Medina and ordered him to send the Imam to him immediately.

When the governor received the letter, he went to the Imam and told him about that. Soon the Imam, peace be on him, prepared himself for travel. When he, peace be on him, arrived in Zubala, Abu Khalid received him with depression and sadness. The Imam looked at him with pity and mercy, saying to him:

- -Why do you look depressed?
- -Of course, I am depressed because you are going to this tyrannical one (al-Mehdi); I have fear for you. The Imam, peace be on him, quietened his fear and told him that he would face no harm during that travel of him. He appointed a time to pass by him.

Then the Imam left him and headed for Baghdad. When he arrived in it, al-Mehdi ordered him to be arrested and thrown into prison. Al-Mehdi slept that night and dreamt of the Commander of the faithful, peace be on him, who was displeased and sad. He heard him addressing him: "O Muhammad, but if you held command, you were sure to make mischief in the land and cut off the ties of kinship!"

So al-Mehdi rose with fear and terror. Then he sent for his chamberlain al-Rabi'.

When al-Rabi¹ stood before him, he heard him repeating the sacred verse. Al-Mehdi ordered Imam Musa to be brought. When the Imam walked toward him, he rose, embraced him, and made him sit beside him. Then he said to him with sympathy and gentleness:

-O Abu al-Hasan, I dreamt of the Commander of the faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib, (and heard him) reciting to me so-and-so. Will you promise that you will not go out in revolt against me and my children?

-By Allah, I have not done that, nor is it among my affairs!

-You are truthful. O Rabi', give him three hundred dinars and return him to his home in Medina. 30 Al-Rabi' escorted the Imam, made his affairs firm, and released him at night. In the morning the Imam was on the road to (Medina).

He covered the desert and reached Zubala on the day when he had appointed to Abu Khalid. Abu Khalid was impatiently waiting for the Imam. When he saw him, he hurried to him and kissed his hands with happiness. The Imam understood his too much delight, so he said to him: "Surely, I will return to them; and I will not get rid of them!"31

With that he, peace be on him, meant that Harun al-Rashid would arrest and throw him into his prisons until he breathed his last. Al-Mehdi brought the Imam to Baghdad one time. The Imam spent twenty years of his lifetime during the time of al-Mehdi.

During that period of time, he spread knowledge and supplied the youths with different kinds of sciences and arts. This period was the most important of his lifetime when he established the edifices of knowledge, virtue, and morals.

The Death of al-Mehdi

The historians have differed over the reason for the death of al-Mehdi. It was said that he went hunting and chased a gazelle. The gazelle entered an old house, and he followed it. The door of that old house was narrow. He hit his backbone against that door, and it was badly injured. So he died on the same day.

It was also said that one of his slave girls was jealous of the slave girl whom he loved and to whom he was loyal, so she put a poison into a food, and al-Mehdi ate it while he did not come to know of the poison. Any way, when he died, his household were impatient to his death, and sadness prevailed them. After his death some of his slave girls worn sackcloth as a sign of sadness and mourning for him.

To them Abu al-'Atahiya has referred in his saying:

They went wearing embroideries and came back wearing sack cloth.

There is a butting day for every a butter of the time.

You will not remain (alive) even if you live as Noah did.

Therefore, wail over your own self if there is no escape from that you should wail.32

With this we will end our speech on the time of al-Mehdi and on what Imam Musa met during it.

- 2. Duha al-Islam, vol. 1, pp.112-114.
- 3. Al-Tajj, p. 35.
- 4. Abu al-Farajj al-Asfahani, al-Aghani, vol. 5, p. 5.
- 5. Shadharat al-Dhahab, vol. 1, p. 265.
- 6. Akhlaq al-Muluk, p. 34.
- 7. Al-Fekhri, p. 167.
- 8. Bayna al-Khulafa' wa al-Khula'a, pp. 25-26.
- 9. Al-Diyarat, p. 100.
- 10. Tuhfat al-'Arus, p. 36.
- 11. Al-Jawahir, p. 61.
- 12. Al-Quttfi, Akhbar al-Hukama', p. 101.
- 13. Al-Wilat wa al-Qudat, p. 125
- 14. Al-Ya'qubi, Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 134.
- 15. Al-Jahshyari, p. 103.
- 16. Tarikh Baghdad, vol. 6, p. 346.
- 17. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 193.
- 18. Al-Tabari, Tarikh, the Events of the Year 169.
- 19. Ibid. vol. 6, p. 397.
- 20. There is nothing refers to this meaning in Surat al-An'am. Besides it does not contain any of the precepts of inheritance.
- 21. Al-Tabrasi, Ihtijajj, vol. 214. It was said that the poetry lines belonged to Muhammad b. Yehya al-Taghlubi. This has been mentioned in the book al-Shi'r fi Baghdad, p. 110.
- 22. Tarikh Baghdad, vol. 3, p. 144.
- 23. Abu al-Fida', vol. 2, p. 10.
- 24. Al-Wizara' wa al-Kittab, pp. 119-121.
- 25. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 4, p. 48.
- 26. 'Umdat al-Akhbar fi Medinat al-Mukhtar, p. 316.
- 27. Al-Ya'qubi, Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 393.
- 28. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 4, p. 248.
- 29. Al-Nibras, p. 24.
- 30. Tarikh Baghdad, vol. 13, pp. 30-31. Wafayat al-A'yan, vol. 4, p. 493.
- 31. Nur al-Abbsar, p. 136. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 11, p. 252.
- 32. Al-Fekhri, p. 157.

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