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Lesson 44: The Seventh Imam (Musa ibn Ja'far)

Name: Musa.

Agnomen: Abu 'l-Hasan.

Title: Al-Kādhim.

Father: Ja'far bin Muhammad.

Mother: Hamidah Khātun.

Birth: 7th Safar 128 AH in Abw'.

Death: 25th Rajab 183 AH in Baghdad.

1. Birth

Imam Musa al-Kādhim, the son of the sixth Imam, was born in 128 A.H. in Abw', a village between Medina and Mecca while his parents were on their way to perform the pilgrimage at Mecca.

2. Political Circumstance of His Imamate

Musa al-Kazim (a.s.) became the Imam at the age of twenty through Divine Command and the decree of his forefathers. His imamate, however, began under a very difficult political atmosphere.

The first ten years coincided with **Mansur** who, as already mentioned in the previous lesson, had given orders to his governor in Medina to behead the heir of Imam Ja'far as-Sādiq (a.s.). His plot failed because Imam as-Sādiq, predicting this move of Mansur, had written the last will in a way that confused the enemies but guided the seekers of truth to his rightful successor.

The Imam had written five names: the names of the caliph and his governor in Medina were just to confuse the enemy. It was obvious that Hamidah, being a woman, cannot be an imam. So we are left with two possible successors to Imam as-Sādiq: 'Abdullāh Aftah, the older son, and Musa al-Kādhim, his younger son. If 'Abdullāh, the older son, was capable of inheriting the father's status, there was no need to mention the younger son's name! This will, besides other proofs, clearly guided the Shi'as

towards their new Imam.

Obviously with such a beginning, it was not possible for the Imam to openly assume the role of leadership. His contacts with the Shi'as were very much restricted. Some relief came when Mansur died in 158 A.H. and was succeeded by his son, **Mahdi**, who adopted a lenient policy towards the Shi'as and the Ahlu 'l-Bayt. During this time, the Imam's fame in knowledge and piety spread far and wide. This fame prompted Mahdi to order his officers to arrest Imam Musa al-Kādhim and bring him to Baghdad. But soon the Imam was released and sent back to Medina. Now the Imam started meeting his followers more openly and continued the scholarly jihād of his forefathers.

In 169 A.H., Mahdi died and was succeeded by **Hadi**. Hadi, unlike his father, had no respect for people's views, and openly persecuted the Shi'as and the Ahlu 'l-Bayt. Morally he was a very corrupt person. It was during his short reign that Husayn bin 'Ali organized an uprising against Hadi which ended in an armed confrontation in Fakh. Unfortunately, Husayn and all his companions were killed.

Hadi died in 170 A.H. and was succeeded by **Hārūn** ar-Rashīd. Hārūn, in spite of all the fame that he has in advancing sciences and knowledge, was a very tyrannical ruler—especially when it involved the Shi'as and the Ahlu 'l-Bayt. He exiled all the descendants of Imam 'Ali in Baghdad to Medina; he used to give hefty rewards to the poets who composed verses against the Shi'a Imams; he even made it difficult for the people to visit the grave of Imam Husayn (a.s.) at Karbala.

Under such circumstances, Imam Musa al-Kādhim strongly urged his followers to refrain from working or cooperating with tyrant rulers and governments. One interesting example is of Safwan bin Mihrān al-Jammī. Once when Safwan came to visit him, the Imam said:

“You are a good person except for one thing.”

Safwan: “What is it, O Imam?”

Imam: “You have rented out your camels to Hārūn.”

Safwan: “O Imam, I have rented them out to him for his journey to Mecca for hajj; and I have not personally gone for taking care of the animals, my employees are going with his caravan.”

Imam: “Don't you have this wish in your heart that may Hārūn came back alive from this journey so that you may get back your camels and their rental?”

Safwan: “Yes, O Imam.”

Imam: “O Safwan, one who wishes the tyrants to live longer will be counted as one of them!”

There are, however, some cases where Imam Musa al-Kādhim allowed a selected few (like 'Ali bin Yaqtin) to work for Hārūn's government only with the condition that they would use their positions to help their fellow Shi'as.

3. His Companions

In spite of the difficult political atmosphere the Imam had trained great companions in knowledge as well as in piety.

Ibn Abi ‘Umayr: Anyone familiar with the Shi’i hadith literature would testify that Ibn Abi ‘Umary is the source of countless ahadith on Islamic laws. Just because he was a student of Imam Musa al-Kādhim (a.s.), he suffered at the hand of the oppressive regimes of the ‘Abbāsids. Once he was arrested and asked to reveal the names of all the prominent Shi‘as of Iraq. He refused even though he had to suffer a hundred lashes after which he was hanged between two trees. According to Shaykh Mufid, Ibn Abu ‘Umary was put in prison for seventeen years just because he was a follower of the Ahlu ‘l-Bayt.

‘Ali bin Yaqtin belonged to a prominent Shi‘a family in Kufa. After the ‘Abbasid revolution, Hārūn ar-Rashid offered him the position of minister in his government. He approached Imam Musa al-Kādhim (a.s.) who told him to accept it but refrain from ever confiscating the money or property of the Shi‘as. So ‘Ali bin Yaqtin, to show his loyalty to the government, would confiscate the money of the Shi‘as but would then secretly return it to them.

Once Imam al-Kādhim (a.s.) told ‘Ali bin Yaqtin: “You promise me one thing; and I guarantee you three things: you won’t be killed, neither face poverty nor suffer imprisonment.”

‘Ali: “What do I have to promise you?”

Imam (a.s.): “Promise me that whenever a follower of ours comes to you, you would honour him and not turn him away.”

4. Death in Prison

During Hārūn’s reign, Imam Musa al-Kādhim (a.s.) lived in very difficult times, in hiding, until finally Hārūn went on the hajj and in Medina had the Imam arrested while praying in the Mosque of the Prophet. He was chained and imprisoned, then taken from Medina to Basra and made a prisoner in the house of ‘Isa bin Ja‘far, the governor of that city. ‘Isa was so much impressed by the Imam’s personality that he requested Hārūn to relieve him of this responsibility. Imam al-Kādhim (a.s.) was moved from Basra to Baghdad where for years he was transferred from one prison to another.

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During his imprisonment in Baghdad, he was taken to meet Hārūn from time to time. In one such meeting, an interesting conversation took place. We will reproduce just a section from that conversation:

Hārūn: “Why do you allow the people to address you by words like ‘O son of the Prophet’ while you are in reality sons of ‘Ali? People are mostly known by their paternal lineage; whereas you are related to the Prophet through your grandmother [i.e., Fātimah].”

Imam (a.s.): “If the Prophet becomes alive and comes to you, and asks for the hand of your daughter in marriage — would you accept his proposal?”

Hārūn: “Praise be to Allah! Why not? That would be the greatest privilege for me over all the Arabs and non-Arabs!”

Imam (a.s.): “The Prophet would never ask for my daughter’s hand; nor would I accept his proposal.”

Hārūn: “Why?”

Imam (a.s.): “Because the Prophet is my direct ancestor (even though from my grandmother’s side); but he is not your ancestor.”

The Imam was saying that all the descendants of Fātimah would be considered the children of the Prophet, and, therefore, it would be unlawful for the Prophet to marry any one of them. Whereas the ‘Abbasids descended from the Prophet’s uncle ‘Abbas, so they are not directly related to him; the Prophet, if he wished, could marry the descendants of his uncle. This difference shows that the Imams of Ahlu ’l-Bayt had full right to be addressed as “the son of the Prophet”.

Finally he died in Baghdad in the prison of Sindi ibn Shāhāk through poisoning and was buried in the cemetery of the Quraysh which is now located in the city of Kazimayn.

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This lesson has been written and compiled by Sayyid M. Rizvi by using the following sources.

1. *Shi’a Islam*’ of Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn at-Tabataba’i.
2. *Pishway-e Haftum: Hazrat Imam Musa al-Kādhim (a.s.)* by Dar Rah-e Haq.

The main sources have been extensively edited in order to fit the requirements of our course. Also, for the sake of brevity, we have not included the references quoted by our sources. Those who are interested to know the sources may refer mentioned above.

Question Paper on Lesson 44

Question 1: [10 points]

True or False:

- (a) The seventh Imam’s imamate started during the reign of Abu ’l-‘Abbās Saffāh.
- (b) Imam al-Kādhim’s imamate coincided with the reign of Mansūr, Mahdi, Hādī, and Hārūn.
- (c) Safwān bin Mihrān was in the business of renting out horses and camels.
- (d) Ibn Abi ‘Umary was a minister in the government of Hārūn ar-Rashīd.
- (e) Hārūn had Imam Musa al-Kādhim (a.s.) arrested in the Masjidu ’l-Harām in Mecca.
- (f) Hādī adopted a lenient policy towards the Shi‘as.

(g) Hārūn exiled the descendants of Imam ‘Ali from Baghdad to Medina.

(h) ‘Isa bin Ja‘far was Hārūn’s governor in Kufa.

(i) Imam al-Kādhim is buried in Kazimayn.

(j) Imam al-Kādhim died in the prison of Sindi ibn Shāhāk.

Question 2: [20 points]

Explain in your own words the will of Imam as-Sādiq which confused the enemies but also guided the Shi‘as to Imam al-Kādhim.

Question 3: [20 points]

In the light of Imam al-Kādhim’s life, explain under what conditions one is allowed to work with unjust governments/rulers.

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