

Harun al-Rashid

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Imam al-Rida, peace be on him, was a contemporary of three 'Abbasid kings: Al-Rashid, al-Amīn, and al-Ma'mun. In the time of al-Rashid, the Imam's soul was full of deep sadness and bitter sorrow, for Harun al-Rashid took severe measures against the 'Alawides in general and against his (the Ima`m's) father, Ima`m al-Kazim, peace be on him. He is the most famous 'Abba`sid king; his name is widespread; his reputation is widely known in the east and the west; the world responded to him; the kingdom was brilliant to him; Baghdad, the bide of the east, was his capital; his rule and power extended to most regions of the world; it was he who said to clouds: "You rain in my kingdom!" The kings of the world yielded to him and became small before his power. Now, we will speak about some :characteristics of his personality as follows

A. Cruelty

As for cruelty, it was among his elements and characteristics. Al-Amīr Shaki`b said: "He (Harun al-Rashid) was as tyrannical and blood-thirsty just as the tyrannical kings of the east were. " An example of his severe cruelty is that he destroyed the 'Alawides, punished them severely, and wreaked upon them painful torture which they had never faced except in the time of his grandfather, the tyrannical shedder of blood, Mansu`r al-Dawa`niqi. We have demonstrated the .tragedies they faced in his time

B. Malice

Yet another element of al-Rashi`d's personality is that he bore malice against those who had noble lineage and brilliant figures who enjoyed a remarkable rank in the social circles. For example, he bore malice against the master of the Muslims, Ima`m Mu`sa` b. Ja'far, so he ordered him to be placed in a dark prison, and to be given poison to drink. That was because the Ima`m occupied a notable position in the souls of the Muslims. Similarly, he bore a grudge against those whose reputation was widely known and whose excellence was spread among the people. He distressed the Bara`mika, killed their eminent figures, abased them, and confiscated their properties; that was because of their rank with the people, for example, the poets spoke constantly about their names, announced their generosity

and munificence.

He was so angry with them that he punished them severely. As a result, malice was one of the qualities of Ha`ru`n's personality and the most prominent one of his elements

Meanness

Harun al-Rashid had nothing of reverential fear and faith; he was ignoble and clinging to his lusts and pleasures. The following are some examples of his meanness

A. His Drinking Wine

Harun al-Rashid was alcoholic. Perhaps he himself undertook giving wine to his drinking companions. His sister 'Aliya made good wine and sent it to him. We have mentioned his alcoholism in detail in our book Hayat al-Imam Musa Bin Ja'far (the Life of Ima`m Mu`sa` Bin Ja'far), peace be on him

B. His Fondness of Singing

Harun al-Rashid grew up among the songstresses, for there was a large number of female musicians and songstresses, for example, there was in his palace three hundred beautiful women who played musical instruments and sang. 1 He classified the singers into three categories:

The first category consists of Ibrahim al-Mousli, Ibn Jami', and Zalzal al-Darib. As for Zalzal, he played on the lute; as for (Ibra`him) al-Mousli and Ibn Jami', they were singers. The second category is composed of Isha`q, Salim b. Salam, and 'Amru al-Ghazzal. The third category includes the owners of the stringed instruments and the mandolins.

Harun al-Rashid fell in love with three songstresses from among his female-slaves; they are Gha`dir, Ma`rida, and Hayla`na. Concerning them he composed poetry of which are the following lines:

The three young ladies have possessed my rein and occupied the dearest place in my heart.

Why do all people obey me and I obey them, while they disobey me?

That is (nothing) except the power of love through which they overcame those who were powerful than me.

We have presented in detail this quality of Harun al-Rashid's life in our book Hayat al-Imam (Musa Bin Ja'far (the Life of Imam Musa Bin Ja'far

C. His Playing Game at Dice

Another example of Harun al-Rashīd's meanness and his paying no attention to the unlawful is that he played game at dice (nard), which is a kind of gambling. One day he played game at dice with Ibrahim al-Mousli. He bet him on the robe of honor which he (Ibrahim) wore. He beat Ibrahim, so he (Ibrahim) stood up and took off his garments, but Harun al-Rashīd refused to wear them and said to him:

"Woe upon you! I wear your garments?"

"Yes, by Allah," replied Ibra`him, "if you want to treat (me) with justice; if you do not treat (me) with justice, then you are powerful and able."

"Woe upon you! Shall I pay a ransom on your behalf?"

"Yes," he answered.

"What is the ransom?" asked al-Rashīd.

"You suggest, O Commander of the faithful," replied Ibra`him, "for you are more appropriate for power."

"I will give all the garments I am wearing," al-Rashīd retorted.

"Then order them (to be given to me)," demanded Ibra`him.

As a result Harun al-Rashīd called for garments other than those he was wearing, and then he took off the garments he was wearing and gave them to Ibra`him. He played chess when he traveled by the Tigris.

These are some acts which have been transmitted regarding Ha`ru`n al-Rashīd, and they clearly show that he was mean and did not cling to the teachings of the True Religion. Harun al-Rashīd went too far in practicing pleasures; his palace was a theater for all kinds of prostitution and dissoluteness; it was rarely void of dancing and singing parties and drinking .wine; therefore, his government did not represent Islam

Harun al-Rashīd's Attitude toward Imam al-Reza(A.S.)

When Harun al-Rashīd assassinated Ima`m Mu`sa` b. Ja'far, peace be on him, he sent a band of his security forces to spy upon the affairs of Ima`m al-Reza`, peace be on him, and to inform him of his tendencies and inclinations.

The Ima`m, peace be on him, understood that, so he intended to get rid of Ha`ru`n al-Rashīd. He went to market while the detectives were following him. He, peace be on him, bought a rooster, a dog, and a ewe. The detectives informed Harun al-Rashīd of that. When he (Ha`ru`n al-Rashīd) came to know of that, he became free from worry and fear of the Ima`m and knew

that he was not ready to establish any movement against him, and then he ordered his detectives to return to Baghdad.

As for Imam al-Rida, peace be on him, he busied himself with spreading the laws of Allah and the teachings of Islam and explaining the sides of the Ima`mate. Accordingly, some eminent figures of his Shi'ites feared that Harun al-Rashid would subject him to a reprehensible deed. They felt that the Imam was not afraid of Harun al-Rashid after buying the rooster, the dog, and the ewe. Some of those who feared for the Ima`m and warned him against the attack of Ha`ru`n al-Rashid are as follows

Safwan Bin Yahya .1

Safwan said: "When Abu` Ibrahim, peace be on him, passed way and Abu` al-Hasan al-Rida` spoke (about the Ima`mate), we feared for him, so it was said to him: 'Surely you have manifested a great affair, and we have feared for you from this tyrannical (i.e. Harun al-Rashid).' 'Let him do his best,' he, peace be on him, said, 'for he has no way against me

Mohammed Bin Sinan .2

Mohammed b. Sinan said: "I said to Abu al-Hasan al-Rida (peace be on him) during the days of Harun (al-Rashid): 'Surely, you have made yourself famous through this affair (i.e. manifesting the Ima`mate) and your sitting in the assembly of your father, while the sword of Ha`ru`n is dripping blood (i.e. the blood of the Household of the Prophet and their followers.)' "Hence he, peace be on him, said: 'I have been encouraged by the words of Allah's Messenger (may Allah bless him and his family), who said: 'If Abu` Jahl takes a hair from my head, then bear witness that I am not a prophet.' For this reason I say to you: 'If Ha`ru`n takes a hair from " .my head, then bear witness that I am not an Imam

Isa Bin Ja'far informs Harun al-Rashid of the Imam'

When Harun al-Rashid left al-Riqqa and headed for Mecca, 'Isa b. Ja'far approached and said to him: "I want to remind you of the oath you made concerning the family of Abu Talib; you swore (by Allah) that if anyone after Musa claimed the Imamate for himself, you would strike off his head. This is 'Ali, his son, claim this matter (i.e. the Ima`mate) for himself, and it is said regarding him just as it is said regarding his father."

Harun al-Rashid paid no attention to his statement; he looked at him with anger and asked

him: "What do you see? Do you want me to kill them all?"

Musa b. 'Umran was at the meeting, so he hastened to Imam al-Rida, peace be on him, and told him about the matter, and he, peace be on him, said: "I do not worry; they can do nothing
" !toward me

Yahya informs Harun al-Rashid of the Imam

Yahya al-Barmaki was among those who informed Harun al-Rashid of the Imam; he said to him: "This is 'Ali al-Rida b. Musa has advanced and claimed the affair (i.e. the Ima`mate) for himself."

Harun al-Rashid paid no attention to him and said to him: "What we had done toward his father
is sufficient to us.

All the attempts which were woven against the Ima`m failed.

The Imam's Supplication against the Barmaka

The Bara`mika played a dangerous role in subjecting the Imam to tragedies, for they made Harun al-Rashid, the tyrannical, bear malice against him. As for Imam al-Rida, peace be on him, he was fully aware (of their plots), hence he invoked Allah against them. Mohammed b. al-

Fudayl narrated, saying:

"In the year when Harun al-Rashid assaulted the Bara`mika and a tribulation befell them, Abu` al-Hasan al-Rida` was standing at 'Arafa and supplicating (Allah); then he bowed his head. He
was asked about that, and he answered:

'I was invoking Allah, the Exalted, against the Bara`mika regarding what they did toward my father, so Allah has accepted my supplication against them on this day.' Shortly after that,

Ha`ru`n al-Rashid attacked with violence Ja'far and Yahya`, and their conditions changed." Al-Hasan b. 'Ali al-Washsha' reported on the authority of Musafir, saying: "I was with Abu al-Hasan al-Rida, peace be on him, at Mina. Yahya b. Khalid al-Barmaki along with a group of people from among the family of Barmak passed. So he, peace be on him, said: 'Those
(people) are miserable; they do not know what will befall them in this year.'"

The Ima`m added, saying: "I wonder at this! Ha`ru`n and I are like this." He placed his two
fingers together.

Musa`fir said: "By Allah, we did not understand the meaning of his statement until we buried
him beside him (Ha`ru`n al-Rashid)."

Allah accepted the supplication of His friend (al-Rida`). He severely punished the Bara`mika, removed their blessings, and destroyed their eminent figures. That is because Ha`ru`n al-Rashid attacked them with violence. He killed Ja'far and halved him and put each part in a

sensitive place in Baghdad.

Moreover, he imprisoned Yahya` along with his own children and confiscated their movable and .immovable properties

The Imam's House is attacked

Harun al-Rashid sent al-Julu`di to war against Mohammed b. Ja'far b. Mohammed, who revolted against him. He ordered him to attack the 'Alawides' house and to plunder their womenfolk of their garments and jewels and not to leave them wearing anything except a garment for each of them.

Al-Juludi attacked the house of Ima`m al-Rida`, peace be on him, so the Ima`m stood up and gathered the 'Alawide ladies from among the daughters of Allah's Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, in one house, and then he stood up at the door of the house. Al-Julu`di said to the Ima`m:

"There is no escape from that; I should enter the house and plunder them (of their garments and jewels) just as Ha`ru`n al-Rashid ordered me."

"I will give (their garments and jewels), retorted the Ima`m, "I swear (by Allah) that I will take all the things they are wearing."

The Imam went on convincing al-Julu`di, and he became calm. Then the Ima`m entered the house and gathered the garments and ornaments of the 'Alawide ladies, to the extent that he gathered their earrings, their anklets, and their buttons. Then he handed over all these things to al-Julu`di, who handed them over to the tyrannical one of Baghdad (i.e. Ha`ru`n al-Rashid)."

Imam al-Rida, peace be on him, was very displeased with this flagrant aggression against his household. This means that Harun al-Rashid did not respect the dignity of the Ima`m nor the dignity of the daughters of Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family.

Besides he behaved toward them just as Yazid's soldiers did toward the family of al-Husayn the sweet basil of Allah's Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, and the master of the youths of the Garden, peace be on him after murdering him. That was (at Karbala`) when they pushed each other like vicious dogs in order to loot the garments and ornaments of the 'Alawide ladies.

Any how, I (i.e. the author) think that Ha`ru`n al-Rashid did not take any other measure toward Ima`m al-Rida`, peace be on him. It is worth mentioning that the Ima`m's soul was full of deep sadness because of the misfortunes which befell his father Ima`m Mu`sa`, peace be on him, at the hand of Ha`ru`n al-Rashid, who placed him in a dark prison for many years, tortured him, and then assassinated him.

Moreover, he was so displeased with the 'Alawides that he punished them severely and killed them everywhere. As a result he paid no attention to their genealogical links and closeness to Allah's Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, who asked his community to treat his Household kindly and to feel pity for them

Sufyan's Letter to Harun

It is an act of goodness to end our talk about Ha`ru`n al-Rashīd with this valuable letter which Sufya`n al-Thawri (or Sufya`n b. 'Ayniya) sent to him, for it discloses many sides of his life. He had written a letter to Sufya`n asking him to show affection toward him and to communicate with him, and he answered him through the following:

"From the servant who will die, to the servant who is deceived by hopes and who is deprived of the sweetness of faith and the pleasure of reciting the Qur'an.

"Now then, I am writing to inform you that I have severed your robe and cut off your love, and that you have appointed me as a witness against you through your confession against your own soul in your letter, for you attacked the Muslim public treasury, spent it on other than its right and used it up on other than its precept; yet you are not content with what you have done; you are far from me when you wrote to me to make me bear witness against you.

As for me and my brothers who were present during the recitation of your letter, we have borne witness against you, and tomorrow we will give the witness before Allah, the Just Judge

"O Harun, you attacked the Muslim public treasury without their satisfaction. Are the people with reconciled hearts, the workers in charge with it, the mujahidin in the way of Allah, and the tramps satisfied with your action?

Are those who know the Qur'a`n by heart and men of knowledge content with your action? Are the orphans and the widows satisfied with your action? Or are some creatures from your subjects content with it?

Therefore, O Ha`ru`n, wrap yourself in your own loincloth and prepare an answer for the question and a gown for the trial; know that you will stand before Allah, the Just Judge, so fear Allah regarding your own soul, for you have been deprived of the sweetness of knowledge, asceticism, the pleasure of reciting the Qur'a`n, sitting with the good; you are pleased with yourself when you have become unjust and an Ima`m for the unjust.

"O Ha`ru`n, you have sat on the throne, worn the silk, lowered curtains before your door, and likened yourself, through the argument, to the Lord of the worlds, and then you have sat your oppressive soldiers in front of your door and curtain; while they wrong the people and do not treat (them) with justice. They drink wine, punish the drinker, commit adultery, and kill the killer.

Are these precepts not against you and them before they judge the people through them? What

shall you do,

O Ha`ru`n, tomorrow when the caller calls on the part of Allah: 'Muster the oppressive and their helpers,' so you will stop before Allah and your hands will be shackled to your neck, which nothing untie except your justice and fairness; the wrongdoers are around you, and you are their Ima`m and driver to the Fire? I can see that you are seized by the neck and taken to the driving, while you see your good deeds in the balance of other than you, and the evil deeds of other than you are in your scale (added) to your evil deeds, a trial (added) to a trial, and oppression (added) to oppression.

Therefore, fear Allah, O Ha`ru`n, regarding your subjects, and keep Mohammed, may Allah bless him and his family, concerning his community; know that this authority will reach other than you just as it has reached you; in this manner the world does toward its inhabitants one by one, so some of them have supplied themselves with useful provisions, and some of them have lost his (life) in this world and the next. Beware, and then beware of writing to me after this (letter), for I will not answer you! Greetings."

Then he (Sufya`n) sent the letter without stamping and folding. 1 This letter gives an account of that Ha`ru`n al-Rashīd illegally spent the properties of the Muslims as well as it gives an account of Sufyan's firm faith, personality, and self-denial. With this letter we will end our .speech about the government of Harun al-Rashīd