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WHITE INK



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Sultan Abdul Hamid II and the Zionist settlement in Palestine

The reader pays attention to the famous phrase of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, where he says: "I cannot sell even an inch of the country because it does not belong to me but to my people, so that the Jews can save their billions". He said those words on June 19, 1896, before his meeting with the founder of the Zionist movement, Theodor Herzl, who was aspiring to obtain a "decree" that would allow the Jews to own the land of Palestine and with international recognition of this right. However, Sultan Abdul Hamid II met him several days later, on June 26 of the same month, to listen to his demands, which led to repeated meetings and negotiations between the years 1903-1896 AD. During this period, Herzl made five trips to Istanbul in order to achieve his goal. Two of his trips were at the expense of Sultan Abdul Hamid himself, who said those words!

Despite the power of the phrase and its effect on the mind of the reader or the listener, we cannot lose our minds in understanding the truth away from the sea of emotions and the artificial divine aura about the personality of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, the caliph of Muslims and their protector! The question that comes to mind here is what is the effect of that phrase on the historical reality on the land of Palestine? What did the Sultan actually do to save it and reduce the risk of Jewish immigration to it? Sultan Abdul Aziz opened his door legitimately to the sequence of these migrations, individuals and groups, when he issued a decree in 1869 AD, allowing foreigners to own lands. The Jews succeeded in exploiting this in various methods, and as a result, the Jewish immigration to Palestine increased. Did Sultan Abdul Hamid's policy succeed in limiting the flow of those migrations to the land of Palestine? Were his words consistent with his actions? These are questions that make a person confused when answering them, because of the strange contradiction in the behavior of Sultan Abdul Hamid regarding the fateful issue of the Arab region.

Here, several decisions of Sultan Abdul Hamid emerged as an attempt by him to limit these migrations, which appeared since the year 1882 AD. With the increase in the number of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe to Palestine, he issued a set of decrees not to allow them to settle there. In 1890, Sultan Abdul Hamid retreated due to international pressure. For example, religious Jews were allowed to visit Jerusalem for a period of three months and not to permanently reside there, for those who are under American and British protection. However, in our belief, this was not sufficient to protect Palestine from Jewish immigration and does not coincide with his statements. The real problem seemed to us that the Sultan himself used to issue decrees not to allow the sale of lands and not to own property directly, and on the other hand he was showing leniency with the Jews by disregarding the application of those decrees regarding their immigration. Also, he was issuing partial decrees in favor of some Jews, according to which they were allowed to buy small areas of land in Palestine. In this way, he overlooked the prohibition decrees. Here, the problem emerged through a set of contradictory actions presented by the Sultan in his attempts to limit Jewish immigration, which - in our opinion - is not far from his conflicting personality.

If we quickly review the historical reality with evidence during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II of the most prominent Jewish settlement communities, we will come out with a very deep mental result that shows the true features of the Sultan's reaction to the Jewish settlement operations in the land of Palestine, away from ideological and emotional rulings. These Jewish settlement communities began to form around some Palestinian cities and towns and outside the city walls of Jerusalem during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II. Here one realizes the extent of negligence, lack of caution and indifference from the Sultan and his Ottoman administration in Palestine, especially since bribery was one of the active beginnings of an example of Jewish settlement expansion. You can imagine that the number of settlements during the reign of the Sultan reached more than twenty-six, such as the settlement of Beit David, Mezket Moshe, Beit Israel, Scott Shalom and others.

The city of Jerusalem also witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of Jewish settlers at the end of the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II. In 1880 AD, the number of Jews was 17,000 settlers, and in 1904 AD their number reached 40,000 Jews. That is surprising. This number is only in the city of Jerusalem alone, and you can imagine the number in the rest of the other cities and towns. Did the Sultan not realize that the settlement operations during his reign were systematic and took place with his knowledge? Where are these decrees and orders to prevent settlement and limit Jewish immigration? What do we call this situation of Sultan Abdul Hamid, who said that we will not sell Palestine, but it was actually and effectively sold?

Finally, those who look in the records of the Sharia courts of the city of Jerusalem will find that there is a large number of buying and selling transactions that took place through the legal agencies of homes among the Jews themselves in their capacity as Ottoman citizens. This also happened with foreign Jews from Russia, Borussia, England, and the people of Jerusalem themselves. All this was done during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II. Also, those who take a quick look at the records of the Jerusalem municipality in the same historical period will find a large number of shops and commercial stores rented to the Jews within the city of Jerusalem. There are more than seventy-one private shops rented out to the Jews, which contradicts the Sultan's tendency to refuse to sell the lands of Palestine. Sayings and decisions were easy to pronounce, but implementation was difficult in reality. It is the historical truth that will not favor anyone or shine an ugly face, but rather shows reality with its strong evidence.