

The Philosophy of Life in the Rasail Ikhwan al Safa: *Ishq & Love*

What is the purpose of our lives on this earth?

This is one of the most profound questions of humanity that many have tried to answer over the centuries, achieving the truth to a lesser or greater degree. The Ikhwan al Safa not only answer this essential question in their Rasail, they also present a compact and practical program by which man can achieve this ultimate purpose of life.

The Ikhwan al Safa say the world is derived from the Creator 'Al Bari' by way of emanation, like light from the sun going forth, or like the number 'two' emanating from the number 'one', and the number 'three' emanating from the number 'two', and on and on and on. The Ikhwan called the emanating principal 'fayd' – an overflowing and pouring forth of light. They say that 'the necessity of wisdom' (wajib al hikma) required that the virtues and generosity in the Bari emanated (afada) from him in successive stages, bringing into being:

1. The Universal Intellect (al aql al kulli)
2. The Universal Soul (al nafs al kulliyah)
3. The Prime Matter (al hayula al ula);

Then this Prime Matter further takes shape as/with:

4. The principle of Nature, the guiding disposition of things (al tabia)
5. The Absolute Body, the entire Universe (al jism al mutlaq)
6. The Heavenly Sphere, the skies (al falak)
7. The Four Elements – Fire, Air, Water, Earth (al arkaan)
8. The World and its Created Things (al muwalladat) – a) the animal kingdom, culminating in humans, b) the plant kingdom, c) the mineral kingdom.

At the lowest level in this Creation is the mineral kingdom, the highest of which interfaces with the lowest of the plant kingdom. For example, coral a mineral substance, grows like a plant. The highest of the plant kingdom interfaces with the lowest of the animal kingdom; for example, the date palm has separate male and female trees. The highest of the animal kingdom culminates in the human being, the possessor of the nafs juz'iyya, the individual soul, the rational mind. The pinnacle of mankind is the Imam al Zamaan, the Absolute Perfect Man, who is Allah Subhanahu's Khalifa, Representative on this earth. The Imam al Zamaan is in contact with the Malayeka, the spiritual beings of Aalamul-Quds, Jannat.

Now the supreme purpose of this life is for the individual soul to rejoin its Divine Origin. This return happens in stages. In the Risalatul Ishq, the Epistle of Love, the Ikhwan us Safa say that to achieve this supreme purpose, Inayat Ilahiyah (Divine Providence) has connected the whole of creation by one overriding principle (nizam). That principle is that every higher form of creation pulls the lower form up to its level. All created things are in themselves cause (علة) and effect (معلول), cause in relation to a lower form (من دون) and effect for a higher form (من فوق). For example, parents are the cause while the child is the effect. This effect, the child, will in turn become a parent, a cause himself/ herself. The effect is dependent upon the cause, the child is dependent upon the parents. The 'effect' has a longing, 'ishq', towards the 'cause' and the 'cause' in turn naturally feels mercy, compassion and warmth (rafat, rehmat and hanin) towards the 'effect'. This interdependence on each other, this need for one another, ensures the smooth working of this system. For example, the weak need the strong, the child needs the parent, the wife needs the husband and vice versa. It is this need which ensures the continuity of any relationship, be it human or otherwise. Hence, the 'cause' pulls the 'effect' higher towards itself, making it capable of taking its place, so that it can in turn ascend to a higher place. The plant absorbs minerals into itself, and then in turn is eaten by animals, which are in turn ingested by humans.

So in this way the higher pulls up the lower. Like this, every created being rises higher and higher until it reaches human form. In this form he is granted the power of rationality, the potential of accepting Allah's Dawat as established by the Imam uz-Zamaan in this world, the potential to regain his divinity. This principle, of the higher pulling the lower up to its level, is echoed within the nizam of the Dawat as well. The Imam is the highest in the hierarchy, followed by his Hudood or Maratib (ranked Dawat dignitaries); the mumin, the believer, is the last in this hierarchy. The higher raises the lower to his ufuq (sphere), and subsequently is himself raised to the sphere above him. In this way the Dawat summons Creation towards eventual reunification with the Divine Creator, as expressed by the Ikhwan us Safa:

إن الله هو المعشوق الأول، وإن كل الموجودات إليه تشنق، ونحوه تقصد، وإليه يرجع الأمر كله. لأن به وجودها، وقوامها، وبقاؤه، وكمالها، لأنه هو الموجود المحض، وله البقاء والدوام السرمدم، والتمام والكمال المؤبد.

"Indeed Allah is the ultimate Beloved. All creation yearns for Him and is heading towards Him and will ultimately return to Him, since He is the source of their very existence, substance, immortality and perfection, because it is He who is of pure existence and He who has Eternal Life, al Baqa al Sarmad, and eternal completion and perfection."

The Ikhwan al Safa say that the soul is drowned in the Sea of Matter, imprisoned in its body/physicality with its desires, pleasures and pains. The soul has three dimensions, three levels:

- 1) Nafs Shehwaniyah (the lustful soul, bound by its own nature to love eating, drinking and mating/reproduction);
- 2) Nafs Ghadabiyah (the animal soul, bound by its own nature to love power, control and domination.);
- 3) Nafs Natiqa (the rational soul, bound by its nature to love the acquisition of knowledge and virtues, and to ascend above the physical material world).

There are two kinds of people in the world, 1) the general masses or common people and 2) the wise men or the elite. The Nafs Shehwaniyya is the dominant part of the Nafs in the common people, who are contented with this material world and its physical pleasures. Their entire concern is this immediate world and they do not aspire to see beyond it as stated by the Quran:

رضوا بالحياة الدنيا واطمأنوا بها والذين هم عن آياتنا غافلون

They are content and satisfied with this world while being oblivious/heedless to our proofs.

The Nafs Natiqa is the dominant Nafs in the elite, the wise men. When these wise people look at this world they see beyond it to its Wise Maker, Knowledgeable Creator and Merciful Sculptor, and attach themselves to Him and yearn for Him. Each Nafs loves its own kind, but can be 'trained' with knowledge and discipline to rise to a higher level of purification. If a person listens to his Nafs Natiqa, it is able to free the Nafs Shehwaniyya/ Ghadabiyya from its total concern with physicality and pull it up to what is afdal and ashraf, better and higher.

The process of unification and purification of the soul begins by Ma'refat and Walayat/Muhabbat, recognition and love, for the representative of the Divine in this world, the Imam uz Zamaan. The Imam is the sole receptor in this world for the special noor, light, from the Divine. He who answers the Dawat, gives misaq, receives in his Nafs Natiqa, the spark of noor from the Imam which will initiate the transformation of the individual soul from its potential state to becoming the actual jawhar, spiritual essence, which it originally was. In Satar, this spark of noor is received only through the Dai al Mutlaq, the Representative of the Imam.

If the individual soul fails to attach itself to the Imam and is not purified, upon death that soul is not freed from the fetters of matter, but remains bound within the world of generation and corruption. It will have to traverse through the cycle of nature and rise in the levels of the muwalladaat, created things, until it once again reaches human form. This according to the Ikhwan al Safa is true hell.

The Ikhwan us Safa say that God has put love and ishq in the nature of man so that after experiencing love on the material and physical level, his mind is able to comprehend and love spiritual and intellectual things beyond the physical senses. When the aashiq looks at his mashooq, what he sees attracts and appeals to him so that he thinks about it and longs for it, until the picture of his beloved is printed on his heart and soul. Even when the mashooq is not in front of him, her face and beauty remains as a ruhani surat, spiritual image, within him; this originally perceived image is united with his own soul, and remains unchanged even when the actual physical appearance of the mashooq is altered. When this stage is reached, it is not just a union of bodies but a union of souls, which lifts the pleasure experienced in the union from the purely physical plane to the spiritual plane. Thus physical love trains the soul to progress from the physical to the spiritual, and gives it a glimpse of how unimaginably ecstatic a union on the purely spiritual plane could be. The Ikhwan us Safa say:

إن المحبة والعشق فضيلة في الخليقة وحكمة جليلة وخصلة نفسية ذلك من فضل الله على خلقه وعنايته لمصالحهم	<i>Indeed love and ishq is a virtue in Creation. It is a great wisdom and a spiritual attribute, granted by God because of His benevolence towards His Creation and His care for their betterment</i>
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Love of the Imam uz Zamaan, and in his satar his representative, the Dai al-Mutlaq, is the highest virtue. This Muhabbat, when sincere and pure, Khaalis, is what makes the soul long to reunite with his Beloved and makes it strive for this union.

ان العشق هو شدة الشوق الى الاتحاد	<i>Verily ishq is the intense desire to unite.</i>
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The aashiq always strives to be near and yearns for his beloved even in the face of immense hardships and problems. Sayyedi Imaduddin says in his madeh for the Dai:

عشق میں جوہے مزا جانے ہے عاشق اسے ایسا بھی کوئی ہے پابند بلا اور بھی	<i>Only the aashiq knows the pleasure of ishq, is there anyone else who derives pleasure in persistent hardships?</i>
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Dawat history gives us outstanding examples of such boundless love and the sacrifices made for it. The Muhajereen left their lives in Makka, their families and homes and livelihoods, and went to Madina simply for love of Allah, His Prophet and His deen. The martyrs of Karbala went smiling to their fate

just for the love of Imam Husain. Sayyedna Shaikhadam Saifyuddin, Maula Ali-Mohammad bin Firoz and others endured terrible forms of torture and remained steadfast, for love of their Dai Sayyedna Dawood bin Qutubshah. And there are many more such examples throughout Dawat history, which are an inspiration for successive generations of mumeneen.

This love, love for Allah and His representative the Imam and his representative in satar the Dai al Mutlaq, is thus essential for najat, for the salvation of the soul, for the union of the soul with the Divine. That is the reason no other amal, deeds of worship and good deeds, are accepted without it, in that they will not help to gain salvation. It is necessary for the individual soul to attach itself to the Prophet, Imam and Dai, who show the way towards reunification with the Divine; it is they who will take the individual soul back to Heaven with them.

Sayyedna Taher Saifuddin says in his nasihat:

اول ولایت چھے آخر ولایت
پھر کے چھے سی دین نورانیہ
یہ چھے غایت یہ ۛ ہمایہ
قرآن ماوی گھنی اہمائیہ
اھناسی قائم چھے سروے فرائض
اھناسی ربانی فیض چھے فائض

Everything begins with walayat and ends with walayat, it is the goal and it is the ultimate, there are numerous aayats in the Quran about it, it is what keeps the banner of deen flying, because of it all other commandments of deen are established, because of it Divine fayz continues to flow...

Imam Mohammad ul-Baqir A.S. says,

هل الدين إلا الحب، هل الدين إلا الحب هل الدين إلا الحب،

What is religion if not Love, what is faith if not Love?

What is deen if not Love!

One of the most prominent teachings of the Ikhwan us-Safa is that:

الفلسفة التشبه بالإلهية بحسب الطاقة الإنسانية	<i>The philosophy of life is to imitate the Divine, [through His representative on earth the Imam uz-Zamaan], to the best of one's human capacity.</i>
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The Imam is the Perfect Purified Soul and the source of all virtue, and he is the one who provides guidance for the purification of individual souls. That is why,

الولاية هي الطاعة

Love—of the Imam and his Dai – is obedience to their commands.

After Ma'refat and Muhabbat (recognition and love) of the Imam and his Dai, for the further purification of the soul the following virtues are required:

1. Acquisition of knowledge - علم
2. Good actions in accordance with this knowledge - عمل
3. Good character traits and virtues. - أخلاق

We will consider and discuss these virtues in the coming articles. Insha'Allah.