

The Unity of Religion, Science and Philosophy:

The *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa* of Imam Ahmad al Mastur^{AS}

Rasulallah^{SA} was sent by Allah as His messenger amongst the Arab peoples, to spread the universal message of Islam. In 23 years, Rasulallah^{SA} established the Deen of Islam and the Muslim Ummah in the Arabian Peninsula, and furthermore, laid the foundation for the spread of Islam outside Arabia. Rasulallah^{SA} appointed Maulana Ali Ibn Abi Talib as his successor to lead the Ummah after him. However, after Rasulallah's^{SA} wafaat the zahiri Khilafat was taken over, during which time Maulana Ali^{AS} continued to do Dawat in taqiyyat (secrecy). Eventually Maulana Ali^{AS} assumed the zahiri Khilafat for four years which ended with his shahadat. The Imams after him returned to practice Deen and Dawat in taqiyyat without any formal political power. Political power was in the hands of Banu Ummaya (Umayyads) for about 100 years, followed by the Banu Abbas (Abbasids). During this time the Empire of Islam had spread to include almost all Middle Eastern countries and North Africa.

Islamic culture and knowledge in the Arabian Peninsula had developed in the framework of the Quran and the Shari'ah (tanzil) as revealed to Rasulallah^{SA} (wahy). The majority of the people in the Islamic world were Sunni and their primary focus was on the study of the zahiri aspect of tanzil and zahiri practice of the Shari'ah. This is what constituted for the most part their understanding of Islam.

The Islamic conquests brought the Arab Muslims into contact with a diverse variety of peoples and cultures that challenged their assumed Islamic way of thinking. Amongst these was the Hellenistic (post classical Greek) from which they received the great philosophical heritage of Greek thinkers such as Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle, who proposed that reason and intellect are the highest tools and guiding principles in a human being's search for truth and salvation. Important works of these philosophers were translated into Arabic, which made them accessible to the Muslim world. This heritage evoked two opposite and extreme reactions from the Muslim world.

On the one hand, there were those who were thoroughly convinced of the translated literature and elevated its importance to exalted heights, like the Abbasid Khalifa Al Ma'mun (d. 218H/833AD). Ma'mun was extremely impressed with these new philosophical concepts and promoted them in every way possible, to the extent that he was ready to declare that reason and not religion should be the highest guiding principle of human life.

On the other hand, the majority of the Sunni Ulama had a very difficult time reconciling this knowledge with their understanding of Islam. So they branded "philosophy" as heretical and bid'at (anti Shari'ah innovation). In spite of strong disapproval and opposition from these Sunni Ulama, however, intellectual and philosophical activity flourished in the Islamic world.

Simultaneously, the Muslim Ummah saw a profound decline in its political, social and moral life. Politically, the central authority of the Khalifa was weak; independent and semi-independent states had emerged throughout the once united Muslim world and there was

no unity of any sort rather it was an age of wide spread sectarianism. The Shari'ah had acquired so many 'forms' under the name of various schools of thought, that it was as though the integrity of the Shari'ah was being compromised by these various cliques, who were using Deen to promote their own political agenda. Widespread treachery, bribery and social discord were some of the symptoms of an extensive social and moral decline.

On the one hand, the Muslim Ummah was in a state of turmoil while on the other, the Greek philosophies and sciences were beginning to gain great importance as an alternative philosophy of life. These questions were increasingly being asked:

- What was the relation of Islam with philosophy?
- What was the ideal Muslim Ummah?
- Why was it nowhere in sight today?
- How could it be revived once more?

To answer such profound questions the ninth Imam Ahmad al Mastur^{SA} and his Duat composed the Rasa'il Ikhwan us Safa (Treaties of the Brethren of Purity). The Imams after Imam Jafer us Sadiq^{AS} had gone into complete seclusion from fear of the Abbasi Khalifa, who was searching for the Imam with the intention of killing him and putting an end to the succession of Imamate. Since the eighth Imam Abdullah^{AS}, the Imams had been residing in Salamiyyah (Syria) disguised as merchants. The Imam's Dais had spread all over the Islamic world, doing their work of establishing the Dawat in secret. When Imam Ahmad^{AS} saw that philosophy as an alternative to religion was gaining ground among people, and that the religion of his grandfather Rasulallah^{SA} was threatened, the Rasa'il Ikhwan us Safa were written and distributed anonymously in masjids all over the Muslim World by the Imam's network of Dais.

Syedna Idris Imaduddin^{RA}, the nineteenth Dai al-Mutlaq says "Whosoever studies these Rasa'il rationally and objectively will definitely know that these fruits of pure knowledge do not grow except upon the tree of Nubuwwat (Prophethood) and the branches of Imamate and cannot be put forth except by one whom Allah has favoured with Ta'yeed and Karamat."

The Rasa'il are precisely an answer to the dire need which the medieval Islamic Ummah was faced with. They show that religion and philosophy are one and the same. Religion is fundamentally based on Intellect and Reason (aql) and philosophy (using aql to logically understand the highest principles of human existence) is the highest human exercise. Deen is based fully on aql is realised as one gradually ascends in the levels of true 'ilm, the levels of zahir, ta'wil and haqiqat as taught by the righteous Imam (and in his satar the Dai al Mutlaq). The zahir, which includes the physical practice of Shari'ah, as well as the different fields of sciences such as mathematics, logic, geography, etc., leads one to comprehend intellectually (ta'wil), the depth and meaning "life" possesses. By attaining the level of haqiqat, the highest and true philosophy, one is able to understand and answer the most profound questions related to our existence. The Prophet, and every Imam after him, is the "highest philosopher" with the highest intellect amongst human.

In this way **Science** (understood through our physical senses), **Philosophy** (truths discovered by using logic) and the **Shari'ah** brought by Rasulallah ^{SA}, form the three core parts of **Religion** that leads to salvation.

The Ikhwan say:

<p>Philosophy consists of three parts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The love of Science and Knowledge. 2. Seeking to know the truth of creation as much as is possible by the human. (The most perfect of whom in intellect and ilm is the Imam). 3. Finally, living your life in Word and Deed according to the attained knowledge. 	<p style="text-align: right;">الفلسفة</p> <p style="text-align: center;">١ . أُولُهَا مَحَبَّةُ الْعُلُومِ</p> <p style="text-align: center;">٢ . وَأَوْسَطُهَا مَعْرِفَةُ حَقَائِقِ الْمَوْجُودَاتِ بِحَسَبِ طَاقَةِ</p> <p style="text-align: center;">الإنسانية</p> <p style="text-align: center;">٣ . وَأَخْرُهَا الْقَوْلُ وَالْعَمَلُ بِمَا يُوَافِقُ الْعِلْمَ</p>
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Furthermore, the Rasa'il are a literary campaign against the immorality of the times, directed towards awakening the Muslim Ummah from the slumber of ignorance and renovating it morally and spiritually in preparation for the zuhur of the eleventh Imam, al-Mahdi Billah ^{AS}

The soil of the Muslim Ummah was ready politically, intellectually and socially for the seeds of the Ikhwan's views to be sown in it. Hence, the Rasa'il were composed, but due to their revolutionary character, and the implicit threat to the existing political regime, the Ikhwan were forced to keep their identity undisclosed.

It is written in the Rasa'il "We the brothers of Purity, Noble friends, were sleeping for a period of time in the Kahf of Taqiyyat observing from afar the changing times and disastrous effects of calamitous events. Then when the promised time drew near and the period of waiting in hiding came to a close (a time during which our followers and Dais had been scattered throughout the Islamic empire) we gathered our forces for the promised time of Zuhur and saw before our eyes our spiritual kingdom taking shape."

This program of reconstruction is broadly presented at three levels.

1. The first is the educational level-the acquiring of knowledge of which the Rasa'il themselves provide a summary.
2. The second level: to make use of this knowledge to know oneself, one's role on the earth and in the universe, and thereby become aware of one's own responsibility.
3. Following the two levels and as its consequence is the third level: the creation of the ideal Muslim Ummah led by the true Imam, the ultimate goal of which is to attain felicity in this world and salvation in the hereafter.

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