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IDEA of 'AKHISM' (Brotherhood), in the opinion of 'Ikhwan al-Safa wa Khillan al-Wafa'

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In the present paper, I will approach to 'akhism' (brotherhood) as a life style and from the perspective of religious, moral and philosophical values with reference to Ikhwan al-Safa. Ikhwan al-Safa is the name under which the authors of the famous *Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa wa Khillan al-Wafa* conceal their identity; these authors, however, often extend the term to cover all the initiates or adepts of their doctrine, whom they also call, more simply, *ikhwanuna* "our brothers", and *awliya Allah* "the friends of God". The generally received translation is "Epistles of the Brethren of Purity", or "of the Sincere Brethren (and Loyal Friends)", that is to say, of those who are united, in the spiritual City, by the purity of their souls (all corporeal barriers having fallen) and the loyalty that flows from this, loyalty to one another, in fact to all men, and perhaps above all to the true *imam* (B. Lewis and others, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. 3, pp. 1071-1076, 1971, Leiden, London).

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It has become traditional to translate the name by which this society of thinkers based in Basrah calls itself as 'the Brothers of Purity and Lovers of Fidelity'. In their encyclopedia, they profess themselves to be a confraternity whose members do not reveal their names. It is agreed that the state of the text, as it has come down to us, dates from the fourth/tenth century. In addition, certain philosophers and historians (al-Tawhidi, al-Qifti, al-Shahrazuri) have given us the names of some of those who collaborated in the work: Abu Sulayman al-Busti, al-Muqaddasi, Ali ibn Harun al-Zanjani, Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Nahrajuri (or Mihrajani), and al-'Awfi.

We are not concerned, as famous grand French philosopher, Henry Corbin (1903-1979) has said, simply with a group of Shiite sympathizers, but with a definite society of Ismaili thought, although the discreet nature of the writing reveals this only to 'him who knows' (Corbin, Henry, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 133, London, The Institute of Ismaili Studies). It is true that the work was a work of propaganda, but the word 'popular' would be out of place here, for

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its content is not popular. If copies of the book were cautiously distributed at the time in mosques, this is because, according to Ismaili teachings, one should try to awaken whoever is capable of being awoken to the knowledge that there is something superior to the literal legalistic religion, or *shari'ah*, this latter being an effective medicine only for souls that are weak and ill. One should try to guide whoever is called to it to the pure Gnostic spiritual religion. It would likewise be inaccurate here to speak, as Henry Corbin tends to, of the 'reconciliation' between religion and philosophy. In esotericism there are *levels of meaning* which correspond to the respective aptitudes of souls. The ideal organization of the Brothers was based precisely on this. It was, to be sure, an enterprise of spiritual liberation—which is not to say of rationalism or agnosticism, for these thinkers would not consider them as 'liberation'. Their concern was to guide the adept to a life in the divine likeness by means of an initiatory philosophy which is in the tradition of prophetic philosophy.

The Encyclopedia of the Brothers of Basrah thus aspires to encompass all knowledge and to give meaning to the struggles of the human race. It is made up of fifty-one treatises. The treatises are grouped in four lengthy sections. Fourteen are concerned with propaedeutic (in the sense of (subject or study) serving as introduction to higher study, or, formerly in the meaning of first year at university in arts and science faculties), mathematics and logic, seventeen with natural philosophy, including psychology, ten with metaphysics, and ten with mysticism and astrological matters.

The Brothers speak of the ideal constitution of their Order. It contains four grades, corresponding to the spiritual aptitudes which develop with increasing age (the idea of the pilgrimage to Mecca is transformed into a symbol of the pilgrimage of life).

(a) Young people aged from fifteen to thirty, trained according to the natural law.

(b) Men aged from thirty to forty, who are instructed in profane wisdom and in the analogical knowledge of things.

(c) Only after the age of forty is the initiate capable of being initiated into the spiritual reality hidden beneath the exoteric aspect of the *shari'ah*. At this stage, his mode of knowledge is that of the prophets.

(d) After the age of fifty, he is in a position to perceive this esoteric spiritual ality in all things. His mode of knowledge is now that of the angels, and mprehends both the letter of the *Liber mundi* and that of the revealed Book 'asail Ikhwan al-Safa wa Khillan al-Wafa , Vol. 1, pp. 7-8).

The organization of the hierarchy is founded solely on inner aptitude and iritual rank, in a context within which 'the ritual and the calendar of the ilosophers' are explained. This is a combination typical of Sabian and Ismaili eas. We learn that the Brothers, like their predecessors, were subjected to the cissitudes and persecutions which are directed against men of God during a 'cycle 'occultation' (*dawr al-satr*).

In 555/1160 the caliph al-Mustanjid ordered the burning of all copies of the icyclopedia to be found in public and private libraries (together with the works of vicenna!). Nevertheless, the work survived, and was translated into Persian and urkish. It has exercised an enormous influence on all the thinkers and mystics of lam.

One of the most progressive advices of Ikhwan eleven centuries ago, upon hich we can count them as the inclusivist thinkers (opposed to exclusivist ones), not to fight with any science and knowledge, not to leave any book, and to avoid l type of fanaticism in human religious fait (*Ibid.* Vol. 4, pp. 41-43). Ikhwan gard themselves as those whose minds are purified, and as those who resemble to od in the measure of human ability (*Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa wa Khillan al-Wafa ,* ol. 4, p. 417), and have attained to the transcendental real sciences and markable arts (*Ibid.*, pp. 411-412). However Ikhwan al-Safa have lived in 4th entury (Seyyed Kazim Musavi Bojnurdi, *The Great Islamic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7, . 245, Tehran, 2008), in their epistles there would be found some allusions lustrating that the notion of Ikhwan exceeds generally a certain group or special ociety, and have a global historical-human attribute, as if they permanently have een living since the beginning of human kind creation, secretly or openly, and ey are still alive and in all periodes (*Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa wa Khillan al-Wafa ,* ol. 4, p. 18).

Ikwon al-Safa are authentically considered as the most remarkable Islamic nostics and mystics. At the same time, Ikhwan know both philosophy and religion s the two divine realities (*Ibid.* Vol. 3, pp. 29-30), admiring the role of intellect or ntelligence (*aql* in Arabic language, *nous* in Greek one) as the human guide (*Ibid.* ol. 4, pp. 127-128). The emphasis on ethics and human soul purification, which imes at preparing to live in the Hereafter, is another significant element of

Ikhwan's thought (*Ibid.* Vol. 3, pp. 301-302).

Ikhwan encourage their brothers to collaborate and to assist each other, their friendship is a type of kinship, each of them lives 'for another'. Since they regard themselves as the same spirit in various bodies, they do good to each other, considering it as if they have done good to themselves (*Ibid.* Vol. 4, pp. 48-49). The fundamental element gathering them in a cycle is that they know that their goodness in the here and their salvation, bliss or happiness in the hereafter entirely depend on co-operating with others. It is merely in these conditions that it may be possible for Ikhwan to establish their 'virtuous spiritual city' (*Ibid.* Vol. 4, pp. 170-171).

When one of your brothers in Ikhwan's society seeks you, he requires you since he believes and holds that you are the same as him, and he is the same as you, a unique soul in two reciprocal bodies, what makes you happy, will make him the same, what makes you depressed will make him the same (*Ibid.*, Vol. 4, p. 49). Your substance is derived from the substance of your brothers, just like your soul, and their goodness is the same as yours (*Ibid.* Vol. 4, p. 188). Ikhwan claim that there would not be any community which intend to collaborate in the profane and religious works stronger and better than themselves in requiring goodness for each other. For each one holds that the religious progression he requires would not be complete unless with the assistance of his brother (*Ibid.* Vol. 4, p. 126).

This sort of definition of bliss in which human happiness depends entirely on the salvation of other peoples, that is to say his brothers seems not to be found in other philosophical systems and ethical schools. This is, I strongly think, the enormous distinction should be made between Ikhwan al-Safa wa Khillan al-Wafa and other celebrated Islamic thinkers who have discussed human happiness in the history of philosophy such as al-Farabi, Avicenna and others. In this regard, I hold that Ikhwan are unique, and their notion of bliss in the frame of their brotherhood must be studied and investigated more than the past.