

A million gripes against the darkness will not make a dent in it. But a little candle will.

This book is about lighting that little candle.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Preface

THIS IS A COLLECTION of articles that were originally published in the “First Thing First” column of monthly *Impact International* beginning in December 1995. The idea has been to present Islamic beliefs and practices as well as to highlight Islamic values in the context of current social, cultural, and political discussions. The broad range of topics includes beliefs, acts of worship, self-reform, women, family, unity, democracy, education, and the media. They aim at providing reflection, exposition, inspiration, and intellectual stimulation.

The magazine’s format and focus preclude parochial subjects, scholarly treatises, or plain lectures. This has been fortunate for I have no interest in the first, no capability for the second, and no eligibility for the third. However I have benefited from the written and spoken words of many great scholars and tried to make their knowledge and wisdom accessible to the English-speaking world. A couple of articles were condensed directly from Urdu and have been noted as such. Some others were inspired by the works of such luminaries as Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, Maulana Manzoor Naumani, Mufti Muhammad Shafi, Mufti Taqi Usmani, and others.

It was Allah’s blessing that the articles were received very well. My original assignment was to contribute four articles for this column. But those articles generated interest and the assignment was continued. People liked to share them by

making photocopies for distribution. Then, as the Internet became the new global wallpaper, people started posting them on their websites too. Some also took the trouble of translating them in other languages. I am aware of translations in Malaysian, Spanish, French, Bosnian, Chinese, and Urdu languages. Some articles have also been reproduced in the Muslim world press like *The News* (Pakistan) and the *Saudi Gazette*. Students and their teachers at high schools, universities, and Islamic religious schools in the English-speaking world have at times found some of the articles helpful in their studies and class discussions.

In preparing the articles for the present book, extensive changes were made. Articles were arranged in sections according to common themes. Original Arabic text and references of quoted Qur'anic verses and ahadith¹ were provided. References for other quotes were also provided in most cases. Footnotes were added. Some articles had references to then recent news items. They were either entirely rewritten or an update was provided. The article on Kenosis was written especially for this book. There are some other articles that were not written for the First Thing First column but have been included here because of their appropriateness.

The sections used to group articles are self-explanatory, with the possible exception of the last one. The common thread in the articles in that section is that they invite the reader to break the mold and take a second look at some commonly held views and practices.

The entire collection was edited to follow a consistent style for spelling and punctuation. In style I have generally followed the Chicago Manual but have also purposely violated it on occasion. For example Chicago suggests writing Mecca instead of Makkah; I enthusiastically disregard that

¹ Throughout this book, hadith numbering for the ahadith from the *Sihab Sittah*, *Musnad Ahmed*, and *Muwatta Imam Malik* is according to the Al-Alamiah enumeration.

suggestion. English will have to become more polite and learn to pronounce Islamic names and terms correctly.

My deepest thanks go to Hashir Farooqi sahib, the editor of *Impact*, who started it all in the first place by inviting me to write for the important column in this unique Islamic news and views magazine and graciously tolerated my chronic failure to meet deadlines.

I was asked many times to compile these articles in the form of a book. But it was the persistence and deep interest of Maulana Ebrahim I. Bham of Jamiatul Ulama, Johannesburg, South Africa that made it possible. The Jamiat's help has been invaluable in getting this book published. I am grateful to them for this.

The hard work of typesetting and producing the camera-ready copy from the original articles was carried out by my children, especially by Muneeb and Areeba. They inserted Qur'anic verses, searched for and added Arabic text of ahadith, produced the index, designed the cover, and offered me every assistance I needed in editing the book. Without their youthful energy and enthusiasm this book could not have seen the light of day.

And I am most indebted to my wife who gave up a promising medical career to take care of the home. In addition to managing a home where this book was possible, she also directly helped with it by proposing ideas, searching for background material, and offering feedback.

Finally, a request to the reader: If you find something beneficial here, please remember me in your prayers. And if you find an error please inform me so it can be corrected.

May Allah ﷻ accept this humble effort and richly reward all those who helped in its compilation and publication.

Khalid Baig

Jamad-ul-Awwal 1425
June 2004

Foreword

THE GREAT MASTER of Urdu ghazal poetry, Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797-1869), famously said that even if the discourse was about God, to know Him, and to relate with Him, it is hard to avoid mundane metaphors, liquor and glass. Such is the power of metaphor.

What Khalid Baig has done is to turn around the metaphor itself. You may be talking about anything but God, not excluding the mundane, but there is no way to avoid or escape His powerful and comforting omnipresence. Where would one be if there was no God?

This is not a textbook on Islam; it is a text that tries to take a look at some contemporary Muslim concerns, from culture and history to family and population, politics and international relations, as well as beliefs and values that inform or ought to inform all our thoughts and endeavors. The idea is to put the metaphor of Islam back into life.

The Islamic discourse is premised on the inborn goodness of human nature, *fitra*, and although the FTF's² primary readership is naturally Muslim, its message is universal and inclusive. One doesn't have to be a Muslim, let alone an eager and earnest Muslim, to be able to read and reflect on the simple and day to day truisms of life we tend to pass by rather unthinkingly. FTF encourages readers to think straight and to think for themselves.

² FTF: "First Thing First".

I am, therefore, little surprised and indeed gratified that FTF is the most popular and must-read feature article of *Impact*. The reward is Khalid Baig's, though the gift is there to be shared by everyone. *Allahumma zid fazid* - اللهم زد فزد - May Allah ﷻ enhance him in knowledge.

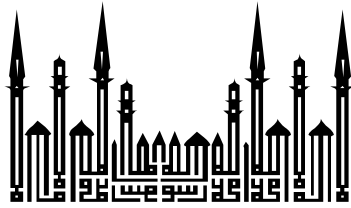
Muhammad Hashir Farooqi
Editor, *Impact International*

Basics

In this section:

- ❁ *Reason and Revelation*
- ❁ *Belief and Superstition*
- ❁ *Allahu Akbar*
- ❁ *Kenosis: A Christian Response to Allahu Akbar*
- ❁ *Prophets and Books*
- ❁ *Joy Forever, Grief Forever*
- ❁ *A Look at Hadith Rejecters' Claims*





Reason and Revelation

AMERICAN ECONOMIST Robert Samuelson once made an interesting observation about the American society in his *Newsweek* column: “America’s glories and evils are tightly fused together.”³ Quoting sociologist Seymour Lipset, he asserted that America’s economic vitality and progress came from the same source as did crime, family breakdown, inequality, and vulgarity. Freedom and individualism had fired economic advance, yet had also inhibited social control. But why the qualities that bring the best in a nation also should bring the worst in it? Is humanity doomed by having its vices and virtues so intricately mixed?

Samuelson does not probe the issue. Instead he seems to be happily resigned to it. “We are burdened as well as blessed by our beliefs,” he says. Economics, we may be reminded, is the dismal science.

Actually the world is not doomed by design. Samuelson comes very close to the truth but he confuses approaches or tools with attributes. A tool that works great in one area is also being used in another for which it was never designed. The problem lies with the user who keeps on insisting on its use in the second area citing its success in the first. To put

³Robert Samuelson, “The Vices of Our Virtues,” *Newsweek*, 11 March 1996

matters simply, it's the free use of reason and intellect that is behind most of America's (and the West's in general) phenomenal scientific and material progress. It's the use of the same tool in moral and religious life that has caused its equally phenomenal moral degeneration!

Every tool has a designated area of application. Outside, it will fail to work. A 4 bit computer is good for some elementary math involving whole numbers. It may multiply 2 by 20 and give the correct answer instantly. But burdened with complex calculations involving several decimal digits, it will give the *wrong* answers. A weighing scale meant for gold will not work for iron and vice versa. Their resolution and capacity are inappropriate for those applications.

Same with the tools we use for learning about the world. Our senses and intellect are wonderful things. Science and technology are all about their use. Certainly it was free inquiry driven by reason that led to so many of the discoveries of science. It happened at an accelerated pace during the past four centuries and the results are everywhere around us to be seen.

But a tool that is so great in one area may be totally useless, even dangerous, in another. Pure reason, uninformed by Divine guidance, is a defective tool for deciding the purpose of life or suggesting its values. What is Right and what is Wrong? These questions require knowledge beyond what we can acquire by using our senses and reasoned analysis. As a direct result, everyone's reasoning is different. That is why philosophers have never been able to agree upon what should be the goal of life. Happiness? Survival? Pleasure? Love? Self-fulfillment? You name it. In addition, it is impossible for us to separate our reasoning in these matters from our feelings. Pure or uninformed reason becomes just a tool to justify what we desire.

Today the West's problem is that it has accepted the wrong tool for developing its moral compass. Probably the majority of its people abhor homosexuality. They may know that it is an abomination and evil. Yet today same-sex

marriages are getting legal sanction in the West. And they are helpless in trying to stop its advances. Why? Because they cannot argue that it is wrong based on pure reason. It is easier to make a case against smoking in public places, then against the worst forms of immorality. Such is the result when pure reason becomes the accepted arbiter of right and wrong.

There is nothing modern about this either. Several centuries ago, Obaidullah Hasan Qirwani, a leader of the renegade *Batani* cult declared it foolish for a brother to marry away his beautiful sister to a total stranger, while trying to be content with a less qualified wife—another stranger. She would be much more suited to be wife of her own brother, with whom she may be a lot more compatible, he argued. His argument is, no doubt, sickening. But is there a counter argument based on pure reason?

Certainly mankind needs a superior tool for determining the values and purpose of life. A source of guidance that is based on certain knowledge, not conjecture. One that can inform our desires rather than being subservient to them. This is what Prophets, *alayhim-us-salam*⁴ عليهم السلام, came with. They claimed to have access to the higher source of knowledge, the Divine Revelation. Those who accepted them used reason and observation to verify their authenticity and character. But they accepted Divine Revelation as a *superior* source of knowledge! That is why a son⁵ can tell his father:

يَتَأْتِبْتِ إِيَّيْ قَدْ جَاءَنِي مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَمْ يَأْتِكَ فَاتَّبِعْنِي
 أَهْدِكَ صِرَاطًا سَوِيًّا ﴿١٩﴾

“O my father! To me has come knowledge that had not reached you. So follow me. I will guide you to a Way that is even and straight.” [Maryam, 19:43]

⁴ Upon them be peace.

⁵ Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) عليه السلام

All this is obvious, except in implications. We accept this is right and that is wrong because the Revelation *told* us, not because it *proved* it to us. What is wrong with *riba*? Gambling? Pork? Alcohol? Revelation told us that they were wrong. Why is *hijab* necessary? Allah ﷻ⁶ and His Prophet ﷺ⁷ ordered that. What are the rights of men and women? Those given to them by Allah ﷻ and His Prophet ﷺ. The attribute of Muslims is that they “listened and followed.”⁸ It is not that they listened and questioned, and argued, and investigated and then if they felt like it, they followed. That is also the message of Prophet Ibrahim’s ﷺ⁹ sacrifice, a defining event for Islam. For the Qur’an describes the moment when the father and son were ready for the ultimate sacrifice, by saying, “When they surrendered.”¹⁰ Literally it can also be translated, “When they accepted Islam.” For pure reason could have raised a million questions about the command for that sacrifice.

Normally it is difficult for us to say, “I don’t know.” It is even more difficult for nations to admit a weakness in their celebrated tools of inquiry. That is the dilemma of the modern world, which sees so much wrong with itself but cannot bring itself to admitting the problem with its basic approach. But a Muslim is the person who has both the wisdom and the courage to surrender before the higher source of knowledge and guidance. For him Revelation informs his reason and his reason controls his emotions. Such is the person who is blessed, but not burdened, by his beliefs.



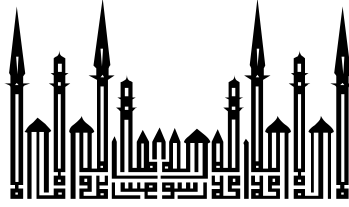
⁶ *Subhanahu wa ta'la*: Glory to Him, and He is the Most High.

⁷ *Sall-Allahu alayhi wa sallam*: Allah’s blessings and peace upon him.

⁸ Al-Baqarah, 2:285

⁹ *Alayhi salam*: upon him be peace.

¹⁰ As-Saffat, 37:103



Belief and Superstition

وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ مَّاذَا تَكْسِبُ غَدًا

“No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow.” [Luqman, 31:34]

مَنْ أَتَى كَاهِنًا أَوْ عَرَّافًا فَصَدَّقَهُ بِمَا يَقُولُ فَقَدْ كَفَرَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ
عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ

“The person who goes to a diviner or fortune-teller and believes in him has rejected that which was revealed to Muhammad ﷺ.” [Musnad Ahmed, Hadith 9171]

THE PRESIDENT OF an American company informs his anxious employees that they are about to get a big contract that will ensure jobs for coming years. Then he adds, “Knock on wood.” If things are more uncertain, he will say, “Keep your fingers crossed.” Keeping fingers crossed is expected to ward off evil. Knocking on wood is meant to bring good luck by enlisting the support of spirits that according to the ancient pagan Druids lived in trees. There are US Air Force crews who insist on touching or knocking on trees before taking off.

The fear of the number thirteen is so pervasive in the United States and Europe that there is a term for it: triskaidekaphobia. American presidents Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt avoided eating at tables where 13 people were present. Many tall buildings avoid having a 13th floor or room number 13. According to one report published in 1990, this fear costs America more than a billion dollars a year in absenteeism, travel cancellations, and drop in trade on the 13th of the month. Of course, it is the horror of horrors if the 13th of a month were to fall on a Friday. (This has a Christian root; thirteen is reportedly the number of people who sat at the Last Supper on the night Judas betrayed Jesus and it was a Friday!)

Welcome to the postmodern, post-enlightenment, neo-pagan civilization. Superstition is alive and well here. In a big city like Los Angeles or New York, one can find thousands of palm-readers, tarot-card readers, and astrologers who even have professional associations and certification programs. Daily horoscopes are an indispensable part of even the most prestigious newspapers. Every year as the year ends, big names in the prediction business make big headlines—and millions of dollars—telling the world what will happen in the coming year.

Superstitions are as old as darkness itself. Fear of the unknown and inability to control or predict our own future have led people to all kinds of irrational acts and beliefs. But that was during the Dark Ages. In the age of science and technology that was supposed to end. The *Britannica* notes, “Being irrational, it [superstition] should recede before education, and especially Science.” That did not happen.

So the experts have chosen to do the second best thing: put a happy face on their defeat by giving “scholarly” explanations. The *Americana* recognizes superstitions as part of being human. It calls it folklore. “Plainly, despite supposed sophistications, human beings are all the folk and thus are—the source of folklore.” It goes on to quote American anthropologist Melville Herskovits as saying: “All human