

The Natural Form of Man
The Basic Practices and Beliefs of Islam





THE NATURAL FORM OF MAN

THE BASIC PRACTICES AND BELIEFS OF ISLAM

Abdalhaqq Bewley

TA-HA PUBLISHERS LTD 

The Natural Form of Man

© Abdalhaqq Bewley 1429 AH/ 2008 CE

First Published as Islam, its Basic Practices and Beliefs, by Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd. in January 2008

This edition published in 1437AH/March 2016

Published by: Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd.

Unit 4, The Windsor Centre

Windsor Grove

West Norwood

SE27 9NT

United Kingdom

Website: www.tahapublishers.com

E-mail: sales@tahapublishers.com

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in any retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publishers.

Written by: Abdalhaqq Bewley

Edited and typeset by: Abdassamad Clarke

A catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN-13: 978-1-84200-158-5

Printed and bound by Imak Offset

Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
ISLAM	15
The Two <i>Shahadas</i>	17
The First <i>Shahada</i> : There is no god but Allah	17
The Second <i>Shahada</i>	
Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah	24
His Life	25
His Character	31
<i>Salat</i> /Prayer	35
Purification	36
Prayer times	38
Doing the Prayer	40
The Fatiha	40
General Remarks about the Prayer	42
<i>Zakat</i>	51
The Payment of <i>Zakat</i>	52
The <i>Zakat</i> of Livestock	54
Camels	54
Cattle	54
Sheep and Goats	55
Partnerships	55
General	55
The <i>zakat</i> of agricultural produce	55
Cereals	56
Pulses	57
Oil crops	57
Dates and raisins	57
The <i>zakat</i> of monetary wealth	57
The problem of paper money	57
The nisab for the <i>zakat</i> of monetary wealth	60
<i>Zakat</i> on savings	60

<i>Zakat</i> on trade goods	60
Debts	61
Business investments	62
Personal property	62
General	62
The recipients of <i>zakat</i>	63
The poor	63
The destitute	63
The collectors	64
People whose hearts are to be reconciled	64
Freeing slaves	64
Those in debt	64
In the way of Allah	65
Travellers	65
General	65
<i>Zakat al-Fitr</i>	66
Who pays <i>zakat al-fitr</i>	66
The amount and form of payment of <i>zakat al-fitr</i>	67
The time of payment and distribution of <i>zakat al-fitr</i>	67
<i>Jizya</i>	67
The payment of <i>jizya</i>	69
<i>Sawm</i> /Fasting	71
The legal rulings concerning fasting	74
General remarks about fasting	77
Hajj/Pilgrimage	81
General remarks about the Hajj	83
The Rites of Hajj	84
The Spiritual Benefits of Hajj	88
IMAN	101
Allah	103
Beliefs regarding Allah	105
The Angels	117
The Divine Books	131
<i>Tawhid</i> – Divine Unity	134
<i>Qasas</i> – Stories	139
<i>Ahkam</i> – Legal Judgements	142
Historical Perspective	149
Divine Messengers	149
The Nature of Prophethood	155
Belief in the Messengers	158

The Last Day	163
The Events of the Last Day	167
The Decree	173
IHSAN	193
The <i>Nafs</i>	200
Shaytan	201
<i>Shahawat</i> – appetites	204
<i>Hawa</i> – subtle desires of the self	209
Pride	210
Ingratitude	211
Conceit	211
Envy	212
Showing-off	213
Anxiety	213
The need for a teacher	214
<i>Dhikr</i> – remembrance of Allah	215
<i>Hubb ad-Dunya</i> – Love of the world	216
<i>An-nafs al-ammara</i> – the commanding self	217
<i>An-nafs al-lawwama</i> – the self-reproaching self	217
<i>An-nafs al-mulhama</i> – the inspired self	218
<i>An-nafs al-mutma'inna</i> – the serene self	218
<i>An-nafs al-kamila</i> – the perfected self	219
<i>Ma'rifa</i> – gnosis	226
GLOSSARY OF ARABIC TERMS AND NAMES	231
PRAYERS IN THE TEXT	236



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE ALL-MERCIFUL, THE MOST MERCIFUL





Introduction

Every baby born is an expression of absolute purity. Anyone who has been present at a birth must acknowledge this. Each new birth is a bursting out of life itself. Every baby is a container for the re-emergence of raw life-energy – unadulterated, undifferentiated. However, this container has a definite form and comes into a specific environment. Each baby has genetic coding determining its physical shape and temperamental balance and each baby is born into surroundings of a particular nature both physical and emotional. These circumstances, together with the chain of events that make up its early life, bring about the individualisation of the new child. They combine together to make the child, in its own unique way, begin to feel itself separate from its own surroundings. Some receive affirmation and satisfaction and so view the world as a friendly, warm, safe place; others are negated and denied and so experience the world as hostile, alien and threatening; and between these two are millions of possibilities and variations different for each child. On the other hand, the kinds of human situations confronted by the child are quite limited and predictable, just as its own specific temperament is of a given type, so that the end result is a being

both in every case unique and yet at the same time falling within a clearly recognisable category, in just the way that, while no two individuals are sick in exactly the same way, the particular illness they are both suffering from can still be diagnosed.

At a certain point, after roughly two years, a picture built up of all the various elements mentioned above takes on a more or less definite shape and the child says, "This is me!" But this "me" is, in fact, by no means solid, but changing from one minute to the next, although it is established enough as a shape to be claimed as an identity. It is vitally important, however, to realise that this "identity" has no real existence in an absolute sense. What has happened is that the pure life energy and undifferentiated consciousness of the newborn baby have, over a period of time and through exposure to a particular environment and together with its innate genetic coding, identified in a particular way with its body-container and become limited and individualised in it.

Through the process of existing, the child has acquired a more or less fixed image of itself which it calls "me", completely losing sight of the unconstrained, undefined, pure life-energy which was its birthright. This assumed identity is accidental, made up out of contingent circumstances and passing time. Given a different environment, a child would adopt a different self-form. The true reality of the child lies in the pure life energy and undifferentiated consciousness it starts with, not the limited and constricted self-picture it later develops.

This circumstantially constructed, arbitrarily imposed first self-image now becomes for us the basis of all our future dealings with ourselves and with the world which surrounds us. It dictates to us the pattern of our life which is, from now on, spent preserving and perpetuating the existence of this assumed identity we have inextricably associated ourselves with. As far as we are concerned, it is what we are. However, just look at any two year-old and you will find a very unbridled raw-edged being: wilful, autocratic, demanding, easily angered, often destructive, attention-seeking, extremely selfish – in a word, monstrous!

In its naked form this “self” is obviously not acceptable, but gradually we learn by experience to negotiate with existence. We find out how much we can get away with, what needs to be honed down, what we can express and what we must hold back, what brings about desired reactions and so on. In other words, we try to find a balance between the raw material of our acquired self-picture, to which we have given absolute reality, and the hampering social environment in which we find ourselves, where total “self” expression is not permissible or possible. In this way, our original self-picture becomes covered over layer upon layer according to the demands of different life situations. But our lives continue to be the playing-out of that first patterning, more and more refined and in an ever larger arena.

In cases where a completely free rein is given to the inclinations of the primary self-image, the individual will return to his infantile form as in the case of the reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes who reverted absolutely to a tyrannical infant, concerned only with the gratification of his capricious whims and unbounded appetites. It also occurs to some extent in senility when an old person loses grip on the cover-up which has been so successfully maintained for so many years. This is the inevitable description of one who has given absolute reality to his acquired self-picture. If this were all that there was, we would have no other option than to be slaves to our own self-imposed identities; our lives would be spent hopelessly trying to assuage the appetites and gratify the desires of a two year-old child. And this is in the fact the lot of an increasingly large proportion of the human race.

However, as we saw earlier, this assumed self-image is not the whole picture. The reality of the self stretches beyond it, before it, to that life energy which preceded it and provided the dynamic for its formation. You can only escape a hopelessly trapped, self-destructive existence taken up in vain pursuit of endlessly elusive gratification of the infantile self-form by consciously determining to refuse to bow to its claim of absolute

reality and by consciously and repeatedly acknowledging the life-force which permitted its existence.

If you look about you at the phenomena of existence in the outside world or inside yourself at the workings of your own body, you will find clearly discernible laws at work, holding everything in harmony and balance. In the vastness of the galaxies and the overwhelming beauty of the stars in their constellations with their patterns and movement. In the solar system and the wonderful way that the planets keep to their orbits held by an unbelievably intricate system of forces. In the earth's atmosphere and how it provides exactly the right conditions for the life on its surface. In the climates and how they preserve the animal and vegetable life in their different zones. In the forest and the desert and how each is a delicately balanced ecological system providing everything necessary for its continued existence. In the separate organisms, each with its own inexplicable breathtaking beauty and its own perfectly balanced cycle of growth and decay. In our own bodies with their perfect co-ordination. With the senses, each with its own field of perception. With the digestive system and its extraction of what is beneficial and its rejection of what is superfluous. With the brain and its ability to store information and release it in the right situation. With the natural healing process and the way the body naturally sets right any disruption of its equilibrium. The examples are endless, but the indications are quite clear. Whether you look at the whole universe or a particular system or a single organism or the smallest subatomic particle, it is abundantly apparent that there is a universal law at work tending to order and balance in every situation.

Only in the case of human beings does there appear to be a contradiction of this harmony. They rush about, on, above and underneath the surface of the earth, wreaking havoc at will, upsetting the natural balance, slaughtering vast numbers of other creatures, ransacking natural resources, polluting beyond use great areas of the globe, turning on each other with an unprecedented fury and so on *ad nauseam*. And it is happening

more now than at any previous time and with apparently ever-increasing ferocity and velocity. The reason for this is that the vast majority of the human species are only concerned with the entirely self-centred gratification of the appetites of the wilful infant they carry untamed inside them in the mistaken belief that this is all that there is. They are quite frankly completely out of control.

This unruly self, however, is not the only facet of the human being and every person has another instrument with which to approach existence – the enlightened faculty of the intellect. The intellect is the means by which the grip of man's self-imposed tyranny can begin to be loosened. Intellect in this context does not designate so much the capacity of collecting, storing, and reproducing information common to every human being, but rather the capacity of seeing situations for what they really are, the faculty of clear discrimination between what is harmful and what is beneficial. It is by the intellect that we are able to perceive the universal law of balance and harmony working in the universe and that we ourselves are apparently, for the most part, at variance with it. It is the intellect that enables us to see that we are more than our infantile self-form and that we have a part to play in the whole scheme of things beyond the mere gratification of our sensual appetites.

When you look out into the creation, you cannot fail to see that every creature, every atom even, has a definite part to play in the creational process. The interdependence and mutual reliance of particles, cells, organisms, systems, is now an established fact recognised in every field of scientific research. This means that the form of a thing does not stop at its physical outline but extends well beyond it into the environment surrounding it. For instance, a planet is more than a mass floating in space. It produces and affects the intricate force fields of all the other bodies in the same system. The same applies to everything in existence, whatever its nature, whatever its size.

We can take the example of a cat. You might pick up the physical

form of a cat and say, “This is a cat.” But if you reflect for a minute, you will find that “catness” goes far beyond the animal body you are holding. As much a part of a cat as its whiskers and tail are its careful washing and grooming, its meticulous eating habits, the way it naturally hides its excreta, the distinctive manner in which it moves, sits and lies, its purring when contented, the way it arches its back when threatened, with its fur standing on end, its motionless lying in wait when hunting, the way it pounces and plays with its prey. All these and other things are as essential to the being of a cat as its physical form. If they are lacking, it is defective as a cat. Also clear, from reflecting on the form of the cat, is the part it plays in upholding the natural balance by its activity of hunting mice and other small creatures, thus helping towards sustaining the harmony of the whole universe.

Any other creature would in fact serve equally well as an example. The point is that every creature has a natural form that extends beyond its physical outline into the zone of behaviour. Every creature also has a clear function in the process of existence by which it plays its own unique and indispensable part in maintaining the harmony and balance within its own sphere and, by extension, in the whole universe. And since this is true for everything in existence, it must be that it is true for human beings as well. It must be that we too have a particular behaviour-form, that we too have a specific function to fulfil in the creational process.

How is it then that everything seems inherently to know its form and function except human beings who are clearly extremely confused on both counts? It seems that we have gone outside the limits of our form and lost touch with it and that we have certainly lost any clear idea of what our function should be. If this were not the case, there would be the same ecological balance in the human zone as there is in every other sphere of existence and it is plain to see that there is not. So what is our natural pattern? What is our role? How can we find out?

As we have noted, wherever you look in the universe you

inevitably find a natural order and balance and everything plays its part in upholding it. It is a dynamic, fluid order where there is continual movement and consequent continual re-adjustment of internal and external forces to keep the status quo. In all of this only man and what he makes appear strident and discordant. Another thing that is quite clear when you look at natural phenomena is that everything is determined; there is no choice involved. A star has no option but to behave the way it does. The planets have no choice as to their orbit. The same applies in the mineral, vegetable and animal worlds on the earth's surface. A daffodil cannot become a rose. A donkey cannot change into a horse.

Each creature is limited and defined by what it is, to being what it is. And it is by every creature and form being what it is that the universal balance is maintained. Everything by its nature both submits to the universal order and plays its own part in preserving it and it is only in the case of man that there appears to be an exception to this rule. It is in this apparent contradiction that the clear indication of our role in existence lies.

Since it is quite clear that there is nothing "haphazard" in existence, a statement borne out by what we have discussed, and demonstrated beyond doubt by all the recent research in every branch of scientific learning, which shows in every case how minutely each form, organism, particle affects the entire environment, it is absolutely inconceivable that in the case of man the universal law is broken, that suddenly "it all went wrong". On the contrary, it is precisely our ability to go against the natural order of things that contains the clue to the purpose of human existence. Our role in existence lies in the fact that we are able to choose to recognise, submit to, and play our part in preserving the natural order and balance apparent in the universe, or on the other hand, to go against it and disrupt it.

From this, it is quite obvious that there is great difference between human beings and all other forms of existence. Every

other thing perfectly fulfils its appointed role, aware of its own limited function and environment. This is the case from the densest mineral life to the highest animal life, from the smallest particle to the largest mass. Between man and all other animals there is as great a leap as between animals and vegetable life or even greater. This is because the human species possesses speech – we are language creatures.

A human being is as prepared by his form for talking as a bird is for flying or a fish for swimming. Modern research has shown that language is not something acquired but rather that linguistic capacity is genetically inherent in a child and emerges gradually. It is this innate linguistic ability, this power to name, to describe, to give expression to intellectual perception, that gives the human species mastery over other creatures. Other creatures are outward and their function is outward. Language is an inward capacity and gives us inwardness and the possibility of reflection and concentration and inner awareness not possessed by any other creature.

It also gives us the ability, and at the same time demonstrates our capacity, to know not only our own environment but also the totality of existence. By our capacity for language, we are able to read the universe, to see within ourselves and in what surrounds us the universal order and balance and to know that we ourselves are inseparably a part of it. We are able to reflect on our own essential nature and by doing so to reach the unavoidable conclusion that all phenomena manifest one single reality, that all the disparate yet inter-connected and balanced elements that make up the universe are clear indications that point to a single source from which everything emanates and to which everything will inevitably return.

Apart from the case of man, it is quite apparent that everything submits involuntarily and unconsciously, just by being what it is, to the universal order manifest in existence, or we could say by extension, to the Divine Reality which it indicates. Everything also, each thing in its own unique way, contributes to the

upholding of the balance and is itself, in itself, an indication of its Creator/Source – in the same way that any artefact indicates the person who made it.

It is this activity of submission and participation in the unfolding of existence, this acknowledgement, even if unconscious, of the source of existence, that constitutes real worship. At this point you must jettison any concept you may previously have held of worship being connected to “religion”. Worship is organic, inevitable. It is an integral part of all existence. By fulfilling its natural function for which it is perfectly adapted, every creature is at the same time performing an act of worship and playing its own part in manifesting and indicating the One Reality. All things, in spite of the diversity of their different forms and activities, have this one thing in common. This is the common denominator in existence. This is the common purpose.

Now we come back to the human species, to ourselves. By use of the intellect, we must arrive at the conclusion that what is true for everything else in the universe must also be true for us, since we are an inseparable part of the whole. Just as the basic function of everything in the universe is unconscious worship, so worship must also be the keynote of our own existence but in our case it will be conscious.

Whereas everything else acknowledges its Creator outwardly by its natural unconscious submission to the way things are, we by our faculty of inward articulation, have the capacity of both outward submission to, and also inner awareness of, the one reality. This then is our purpose, our reason for being here, and also what defines our outward form – that we both outwardly conform to the natural boundaries imposed on us by the form which we have been given and that we inwardly realise our capacity for decoding what we see around us and accept that existence is what it is, a generous and compassionate outpouring, the self-manifestation of the essence of the One God, the Lord of the heavens and the earth and everything between them.

These boundaries delineating the natural form of the human

being, showing what it is to be a human creature, have always been available to people, accepted by some, rejected by others, together with the knowledge of the true picture of existence. All creatures except man have their form indelibly stamped in them so that they have no need of external stimuli to bring them out of them. But in our case, the tendency is to go beyond the bounds. We have to choose to be human. We have to choose the form that is in reality our true nature. It is very important to grasp this. Even though we have to learn what it is to be truly human, all we are doing is removing ignorance and uncovering what is in fact our organic natural pattern.

What this means is that what is generally called morality is not something imposed on man out of social convenience, but something that is inherent in us and required by our form for the proper functioning of the human social nexus. In illustration of this: there is a type of goose that is naturally monogamous. Once it has chosen its mate, it remains with it until one or the other of them dies. Then the survivor can only mate with another whose own mate has also died. This is not brought about by some elder goose preaching that anything other than monogamy is forbidden for such geese! It is a natural patterning coming from within them and appearing in a social context. The unlicensed behaviour, the unrestricted giving way to the infantile appetites, which is the present hallmark of the human situation, is in fact unnatural. It constitutes a covering-up of the simple moral order that is the true reality of human society. Morality is the organic result of a natural patterning allowed to express itself in the social sphere.

We have noted that every creature knows its form and it is not in the evidently compassionate nature of existence that we, the human species, should alone be left with no way to know the form we should take on to truly fulfil our humanness and of course the simple fact is that we have not been neglected. At regular intervals throughout the time that human beings have inhabited the earth we have been reminded of the total

knowledge we are capable of containing, and shown the form that is naturally ours, by men who have been directly inspired by Reality Itself to carry out this task.

These teachings have in part survived to this day in the form of the so-called “religions” and this explains the clear similarities that exist between them. But they are for the most part just archaeological fragments of original teachings which have been more or less distorted, vitiated, pieced together and adapted to man’s lower nature. This has made them separate and antagonistic to each other, thus obscuring the fact that they are in reality successive manifestations of one continuously repeated teaching by men sent to other men by their Creator to show them and tell them how to be human.

Show and tell. The teaching has been both by example and by word. The two must go together for the necessary transformation to take place. In each case, a transmission took place from these Divinely inspired Messengers to the human communities where they appeared, whereby communities who had relapsed into ignorance and squalid sensual gratification, who had on a mass scale allowed their infantile self-form to take over and become the dominant influence in society, whereby these communities were purified, lifted up, and transformed by the transmissive process into radiant examples of true humanity.

They were communities where generosity, justice, compassion and humility were the rule rather than the exception and where people lived within clear moral limits which are in reality the picture of truly human nature. It is these Messengers from Reality together with their communities who gave rise to what are now known as the “world religions” but these have for the most part been altered beyond recognition, so that their original purpose, to show humans how to be human, has been all but completely obscured.

The one exception is the final complete version of the pure human teaching, the one revealed to Muhammad in Arabia in the early seventh century of the Christian era. It was transmitted

by him to those around him and practised by them in Madina. It is known as Islam. This is where we must look if we desire to find the picture of the true human form and to know the knowledge that we are capable of containing, since, of all the teachings, it is the only one we know for certain to be completely intact. The message is there, unchanged by a single word, in the form of the Qur'an, giving us directly from Reality Itself the picture of the whole of existence and telling us exactly our part in it.

The example of the Messenger Muhammad ﷺ was minutely recorded showing us the perfection of the human form and how those around him took it on and therefore how we ourselves can do the same. This is not to say that some Muslims have not gone the way of previous communities and distorted and misapplied and misunderstood the original teaching. They clearly have. But the original teaching is still totally available and accessible for those who want it. The chain of transmission leading from the last of the Messengers, Muhammad, is unbroken and continues to this day.

An incident occurred during the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ during which the component parts, which make up the whole human life transaction which is known as Islam, were comprehensively defined:

'Umar ibn al-Khattab said, "One day while we were sitting with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ there appeared before us a man whose clothes were exceedingly white and whose hair was exceedingly black. No trace of travel could be seen on him and none of us knew him. He walked up and sat down by the Prophet ﷺ. Resting his knees against his and placing the palms of his hands on his thighs, he said, 'O Muhammad! Tell me about Islam.' The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'Islam is to testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, to establish the prayer, to pay the *zakat*, to fast Ramadan and to make the pilgrimage to the House if you are able to do so.' He said, 'You have spoken the truth,' and we were

amazed at him asking him and then saying that he had spoken the truth. He said, 'Then tell me about belief.' He said, 'It is to believe in Allah, His angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the Last Day, and to believe in the decree, both its good and its evil.' He said, 'You have spoken the truth.' He said, 'Then tell me about *ihsan*.' He said, 'It is to worship Allah as though you see Him for while you do not see Him, He sees you.' He said, 'Then tell me about the Hour.' He said, 'The one asked about it knows no more about it than the asker.' He said, 'Then tell me about its signs.' He said, 'That a slavegirl will give birth to her mistress and that you will see barefooted, destitute herdsmen competing in constructing lofty buildings.' Then he left but I stayed for a while. Then the Prophet ﷺ said, 'Umar, do you know who the questioner was?' I said, 'Allah and His Messenger know best.' He said, 'It was Jibril (Gabriel) who came to teach you your life-transaction.'" (Muslim)

This incident supplies the framework around which this book is constructed and ensures two things. All Muslims agree that this account provides an authentic designation of all the basic elements of Islam and so by including all of them all the basic beliefs and practices of Islam are covered. Secondly by limiting what is said to this framework the material discussed is necessarily restricted to only those things which are generally recognised to be fundamental to Islam and so shows many matters which often grab headlines to be the peripheral things they really are. Each of the elements mentioned is dealt with individually at some length and the result is a comprehensive overview of Islam which will hopefully dispel some commonly held misconceptions and give a clear picture of how the Muslims understand and practise their religion on a day to day basis.



ISLAM

is to testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, to establish the prayer, to pay the *zakat*, to fast Ramadan and to make the pilgrimage to the House if you are able to do so.