

The Basmalah and Beginning with the Name of Allah

To begin any intellectual or physical endeavor "in the name of Allah" is to formulate properly one's intention and, therefore, to link that act deliberately to our worship of Allah and nothing else. Beginning all matters of concern with the name of Allah is a feature unique to Islam. And even though some of us may do it unconsciously, it is still part of the Muslim character, and this, we believe, makes learning the legal rulings concerning *basmalah* part of one's obligations as a Muslim.

By Ahmad Zaki Hammad & Amer Haleem



DEPARTMENTS

4 EDITOR'S NOTE

6 STRAIGHT TALK

8 LETTERS

10 HEART TALK

Hearts swinging between hope & fear.

12 PATHS TO PARADISE

Muslims are obligated to make sure all their convictions, speeches and actions are authentically knowledge-based.

14 CHARACTER

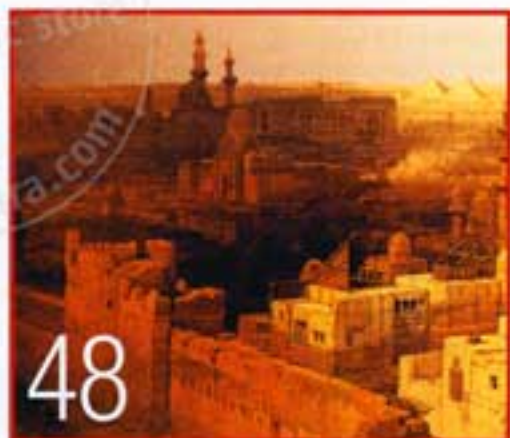
Leading a very busy life style? No problem, just keep in mind that that is a not a good reason for you to neglect your religious obligations.

16 YOUTHFUL HORIZONS

Ends do not justify the means: questioning the increasingly pervasive phenomenon of using questionable means to propagate Islam.

32 LETTERS FROM THE BACKWOODS

A young man's burden of independence. When ambitions inspired by starting college are challenged by the need to make choices of life-long impact.



The Rise and Consolidation of the Ulama in Islam-3 (Series: The Aftermath of the Mubna and Transformations of Islam during the Fourth Century)

FATAWA

■ Inconvenienced by her Husband's Smoking

■ Commercializing Mother's Milk

18

DEPARTMENTS

34 SCIENCE UPHOLDS FAITH

Reflections on the miracles of creation in the human body and the splendor of God Who created them in such perfection.

36 MIND OVER MATTER

Deconstruction and refutation of the secularists' claim that Islam is not a natural pattern of existence but rather a man-made system of social control.

40 QUR'AN AND LIFE

A review of some of the cures the Qur'an presents for the pandemic of social ills that humanity has surrendered to as "facts" of communal living.

44 MADARIJ-US-SALIKEEN

Translation series of Ibnul Qayyim's classic manual of Islamic Spirituality: Madarij-us-Salikeen (Steps of the Seekers).

64 REFLECTIONS

In this world, everything we do leaves a mark, on it and on our souls. It would be a shame if they were things we didn't even mean.

FAMILY LIFE



52



54

50 PARENTING

True orphans are not those whose parents have died. Rather, they are those whose parents have neglected or given up on them.

54 WOMEN'S ISSUES

'The silent treatment' retaliatory technique is harmful to you and to those on whom you inflict it.

58 HEALTH MATTERS

Figs: their unique properties, health benefits and the richness of their Islamic meaning.

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Knowledge: The Bedrock of Muslim's Life

BY ABDUL HAMEED IBN BADEES (DIED IN 1359AH/1940CE)

Knowledge, and knowledge alone, is what guides the Muslim's entire life. It informs and directs the course of his beliefs, utterances and actions. This is attested in the Qur'an: "And do not pursue that, of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart—[about] all those [one] is certainly questioned." [17:36]

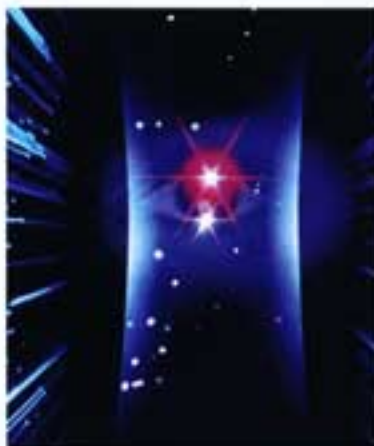
Man's conduct in life is inseparably linked to his thought, such that when his thought straightens, his conduct follows suit. For his actions and utterances are but echoes of his beliefs which in turn are the fruits of the conceptualizations he arrives at through thoughtful, analytical speculation. And, of course, these conceptualizations vary in their degrees of strength and weakness. At the top, there stands true knowledge (*ilm*) which is the realization of something in the only correct way it should be realized. In the next level lies valid assumption (*dhann*) which denotes conceptualizing something in the most probable way it should be interpreted. Then *wahn* or delusion comes in third, and it means interpreting something in a way belonging to the improbable and under-weighted side of all possible ways of conceptualizing it. And lastly, in the fourth place resides *shakk* or doubt which is to arrive at two or more equal conceptualizations of something such that none may be clearly seen to gain precedence over the other(s). Obviously, *Wahn* and *shakk* are both unreliable forms of knowledge.

And because man's innate weakness and hastiness sometimes instigate him to base his beliefs, utterances and actions on delusions, doubts or assumptions (invalid assumption that is)—a situation that often puts him in deviation's ways—Allah instructs his servants that they must base their beliefs, utterances and actions on a solid footing of genuine knowledge: "And do not pursue [do not assume, do not say or act upon] that of which you have no knowledge..." [17:36] Indeed, we should always avoid

situations where we could uncritically believe in any idea that crosses our minds. We should, rather, learn to think deep about things. And if we gain a true knowledge about them, believe in them, or otherwise leave them where they belong: in the sphere of delusions and invalid assumptions. The Prophet, *sallallahu alayhe wa sallam*, said in this regard, "It is enough lying a person commits when he repeats everything he hears." (Muslim)

Moreover, even when we have to talk about something of which we have full knowledge, we should do that with full deference for the Islamic legal restrictions that govern and regulate speech, the attending spatial and temporal circumstances, and the state of the audience. For we are legally obliged to say to people only those things that fall within their pale of understanding, or otherwise, we will "drive them into *fitnah* (trial)," as one hadeeth has it. Adhering to this principle will make our beliefs correct, our statements truthful and our actions appropriate. For indeed, the problems we see in some people's beliefs, statements, and deeds are but bitter fruits of their disregard for this fundamental principle.

So, and as per the foregoing verse, we are prohibited to pursue that of which we have no knowledge, as well as directed to ascertain that our beliefs are correct, our statements truthful and our actions appropriate. As to correct beliefs—either religious or mundane—there is no harm in harboring them, and





THE PROPHET, SALLALLAHU ALAYHE WA SALLAM, SAID:
 “Any significant act that does not begin ‘in the name of Allah’ is severed.” (Nasa’i)

MORALITY AS THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF EVERY ACTION

BEGINNINGS ARE SUCH delicate things, like the fragile seed from which a great tree grows, or the tenuous embryo at the moment of conception. That is because the beginning of anything contains all its potentiality—or, if we put it in metaphysical terms, all a thing’s intentionality, its reason for being. This is the crucial first principle of all human actions—which the Qur’an defines as inclusive of our speech and meditative thought in addition to our physical deeds. So, in reality, morality resides in the initiation-event of a human action, rather than in the action itself. For this reason one and the same act—a salah, a kiss, a gift—can be right or wrong; that is, divinely rewarded or penalized, depending, not upon its content, but upon its *intent*.

There is an important point to be made here. Morality, in the sight of Allah, and, therefore, in the classification of the religion of Heaven, is not merely a static set of values in

which one is to believe and toward which one should incline. Rather, morality is Heavenly religion itself in the dynamic, attaching itself to every individual human action as its “true” aspect. In other words, “religion” is the defining component of every action’s value, the unseen dimension of every mindful anatomical, intellectual, or emotional behavior, the divine register that assigns that specific act its precise significance and worth according to the predetermined and immutable calculation of Allah.

The truth is, then, that every human act is worship—whenver it occurs and whether or not we are aware of having intended it to be so, because the reality of our condition is that the One who created cognizant human nature locked it into a constant state of worship. In this way, the true purposes of our acts betray the genuine loves of our hearts and the actual ambitions of our souls, as opposed to our stated or apparent passions. This is the meaning of the widely quoted verse: “And [know that] I have not created [either] jinn or human beings [for any other end] but to [know and] worship Me [alone].” [51:56]

It is not only that men and women are “supposed” to worship their Creator and no other, which is true and the commonly understood meaning, but that the very natures upon >>



which create universal morality and a reason for immutable principles of social-cohesion.

However, such rhetorical use of indigenous people is based on an inaccurate understanding of those people's way of life, and a false understanding of human nature itself. This is so for two reasons: first, those who live closer to nature often have some of the most highly elaborate systems of socialization; and second, there is a difference between living "in nature" and living "naturally".

In fact, it may be said that no human being lives in a pure natural state. In other words, no human lives in subjugation to Nature alone, but always perpetuates spiritual, physical and social structures in order to create a barrier between itself and the raw elemental and spiritual nature of the world. Actually, anthropologists and others who have come into contact with communities of indigenous people have always found highly ritualized and regimented social structures which permeate all aspects of the individual's consciousness. Familial, religious, and collective-traditional values are enforced from the earliest ages, and in some cases continue on in ritualized transitions from childhood to adulthood, and then from common adult to a particularized functional role in the community. These are usually rigid and unchanging, having

a fixed place in the traditional knowledge transmitted from one generation to the next. This is the way of life to

which they are entitled, and it is this way of life that has allowed them to be in a continuous process of social relationships-building.

The concept of living "naturally", as often romanticized by thinkers in Europe and America who cite indigenous cultures in their attempts to refute monotheism, is therefore a highly contradictory term, in as much as it seeks most often to denote—despite what we have pointed out about the indigenous patterns of cultural structures—a *perceived* lack or paucity of such structures in such groups of people.

So it must be clearly understood that what has been empirically shown to be "natural" for human beings living in nature is precisely the opposite: clear structure, order, and regimentation of daily life that shields them from the affliction of the world as it is on the physical and spiritual constitution of human beings. *Even a culture which believes in the divinity of nature or objects within nature would insist upon the proper rit-*

ualized worship accorded to those objects of divinity as a *necessary part of life, a necessary guiding force on the autogenetic consciousness of the human individual living in the natural world.* In all truth, it could be said that if we look at both "modernized" and "primitive" cultures we would find that every single community of people is in an "unnatural state" as long as we define a "natural state" as a lack of emphatic structural restraints against the intellectual and bodily impulses of the individual in the material world. How odd that the only society in which the most unrestrained doctrines which promote the supremacy of our human whims and desires occur is one which is so fully sanitized, homogenized, and industrialized,

No human being lives in a pure natural state.

that it would be a far cry from anything remotely deserving of the label "natural". It is this paradoxical situation of unparalleled levels of wealth and power to manifest one's own desires which underlies popular desire to lead a "natural" and spontaneous direction of one's own life, apart from divinely revealed moral codes, and it is this definition which must be flatly rejected.

The Soul is Eternal and Set upon Fitrah – the World is Temporary and should be Used under Direction of the Well-Guided Soul

To settle a common debate among social scientists, we are obliged to affirm that Man is, primarily, a being of nurture, not of Nature. This is in fact the qualifier of all attempts to truly understand mankind, and any sort of natural state with which he might iden-



Sweet Figs

BY ELIZABETH ANNE RIBBECK, RN, CNM

By the fig and the olive. And (by) Mount Sinai. And (by) this secure city (i.e., Makkah). We have certainly created man in the best of stature. Then we reduced him to the lowest of the low. Except for those who believe and do righteous deeds, for they shall have a reward uninterrupted. So what causes you to deny the Recompense? Is not Allah the most just of judges?" [95:1-8]



On a warm sunny evening in late summer, the grasses and plants linger in the air as dusk approaches. In the darkening golden sky, a honey colored sun drips its rays into the horizon. As my eyes wander the natural delights that Allah surrounds me with, amidst a

waft from the extended green foliage, a yellow fig gleams in the last glow of daylight. It reminds me of the end of summer last year; one hot evening my son watered fig trees. The gentle trickle of soothing water penetrated the soil, leaving the roots of the tree to sip away. On rising in the morning we found a harvest to cherish—once green, hard figs swelled soft and dulce with fragrant fruits. We collected the bursting figs carefully, thanking God for each treasure.



Not only are figs fair and light, but they are graceful, mysterious fruits. Their leaves are a symbol of modesty, yet it is the fruit itself that encloses hidden riches. The fig fruit is actually an inverted flower that is folded up inside. A special fig wasp enters a hole at the bottom of the fig in order to pollinate the fig. Thereafter, the fruit seeds grow creating the luscious pinkish "fruit" inside the reversed flower. All of this is hidden to our eyes; the flower goes unnoticed until it is transformed into the fig we consume.

Figs are healthful and beneficial to eat. The typical serving of figs is three to five pieces (depending on the variety and size). A serving of figs satisfies approximately 20% of our daily fiber intake, as well as provides a wealth of other vitamins and minerals, including iron, calcium, and potassium (Slavin, 2006). Figs have an abundance of phytochemicals that we are just beginning to understand. One of them is benzaldehyde, a chemical that works against tumors. Figs help fight against diabetes, high blood cholesterol, heart disease, colon cancer, digestive tract disease, constipation, diarrhea, and osteoporosis (Slavin, 2006). People with pyloric problems or peptic ulcers that may have changes in the acid content of their stomachs that causes the seeds to build up in masses should talk to their doctors before eating figs.

