



THE NATURAL FORM OF MAN

THE BASIC PRACTICES AND BELIEFS OF ISLAM

Abdalhaqq Bewley



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

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.



The Two *Shahadas*

*to testify that there is no god but Allah ...
and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah*

THE FIRST SHAHADA: THERE IS NO GOD BUT ALLAH

Various versions of this formula appear numerous times throughout the Qur'an and in many hadiths. A representative example from the Qur'an is:

*Know then that there is no god but Allah
and ask forgiveness for your wrongdoing,
and for the men and women who believe.
Allah knows your activity and your repose. (47:20)*

There is one creative power which is the source of all existence, from which everything that exists has poured forth and back to which everything is inevitably drawn when its lifespan comes to an end. This power sustains everything in existence and is totally aware of everything in existence at every moment. The material universe in which we live is merely an outer dimension of a multidimensional cosmic reality radiating out from that unitary source which includes other dimensions, the effects of which can be felt in this one. The human being is the potentially conscious locus of knowledge of this true nature of existence and there are very few people who, in their heart of hearts and their hours of greatest need, do not acknowledge the existence of God.

It says in the Qur'an that Allah only created men and jinn to worship Him and it is clear that worship in a general sense is a basic human instinct. Worship has demonstrably played a pivotal role in every society throughout the whole history of the human race. What the first *shahada* states unequivocally is that there can be no real object of worship except Allah. Over the ages human beings have turned many things into objects of worship: natural phenomena such as the sun and other heavenly bodies and mountains, oceans, trees and various animals on the surface of the earth, idols forged from metals or carved from stone, wood or clay, and in modern times more abstract things such as nationalism, communism, capitalism, scientific materialism and other ideologies of that kind, and also throughout time such mundane things as women, money and power.

These things represent open idolatry when people consciously worship them as gods but there is a more subtle way of turning things into objects of worship which happens when people invest things with attributes which properly speaking can only be ascribed to the Divine. One of the definitions the Qur'an gives of an object of worship is something which people turn to in the hope of gaining benefit or out of fear of receiving harm and it makes clear that nothing can, in real terms, be the cause of either benefit or harm for anyone except Allah alone. It is almost certain, however, that nearly all of us brought up and educated in this age of scientific materialism truly believe that harm and benefit come to us through many other things; all of us tend to attribute absolute effectiveness to the means through which we receive what comes to us. By doing this we in fact invest ordinary objects with intrinsic power and by doing this, because most of us now lack even an intellectual grasp of the theological truth, we imbue ordinary objects with attributes that can properly speaking only rightfully be ascribed to the Divine Reality. Even though we do it unconsciously, we are in fact turning all kinds of things into objects of worship. We are claiming that there are other gods besides Allah.