

# **FIRST THINGS FIRST**



# FIRST THINGS FIRST

*For Inquiring Minds  
and Yearning Hearts*

Khalid Baig



MAKTABATUL FURQAN  
PUBLICATIONS



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Cover: The inscription on the cover is Arabic calligraphy for *La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad ur rasool-ullah*. (There is no god except Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.)

*To Abbajan and Ammijan who inculcated in me the love for reading and writing.*

رَبِّ اَرْحَمَهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا

*To my wife. My partner and supporter whom Allah ﷻ made a means of bringing so many blessings in our lives.*

*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.*

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## *Preface*

THE PUBLISHING OF THIS book brought me a mix of great joy and sorrow. The warm welcome it received and many kind comments that came from near and far have been a source of encouragement. It is good to know that many people have found the contents of this book beneficial and that because of this it is being reprinted in less than a year after its first publication. And all praise is due to Allah ﷻ.

The sadness came from the fact that my dear father, Muhammad Rafique Baig, left this world without being able to see it. When I reached the clinic in Karachi where he would spend the last days of his life, his rapidly advancing lung cancer had debilitated him tremendously. He died four days later.

It would have given him great pleasure to see this book. But that was not the Will of Allah. Now I pray that Allah ﷻ makes it a source of joy for him in the Hereafter.

In this reprint the article on music has been added. To make room for it, the article on Christmas was removed. Some typographical errors were corrected and some subtle changes were made in style. The second printing, just like the first, has been made possible by the active interest and generous support of the Jamiatul Ulama in South Africa.

Khalid Baig

Rabi-ul-Awwal 1426  
April 2005

# *Preface to the First Printing*

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 ahadith<sup>1</sup> 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 of Style* but have also purposely violated it on occasion. For example Chicago suggests writing Mecca instead of Makkah; I enthusiastically disregard that 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

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

#### Preface to the First Printing

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

RARELY DOES AN ISLAMIC book arrest the attention of the non-scholarly fraternity of South Africa in such a manner as did Khalid Baig's *First Things First*. Within a few days, our entire stocks were depleted by enthusiastic readers who purchased additional copies to distribute to others in order to share their enlightening and thought-provoking experience.

Baig has skillfully presented the timeless teachings of Islam to a western audience—Muslim as well as non-Muslim—in a way that appeals to a mindset used to receiving information in a non-debating, non-sermonizing, and non-academic style. The overall effect of this is that one is not overawed by the glamour of modernization which Baig manages to deconstruct and expose its hypocritical side.

This book has restored the confidence of the Ummah in Islam. It questions stereotypes and idiosyncrasies, removes the blinkers from our eyes using simple logic, and compels the reader to ponder the situation in a way that is difficult to ignore. One is left energized and wonderstruck after reading any article. It should be introduced as extracurricular reading for students attending universities, Muslim schools, and madrasahs. I pray that Allah ﷻ accepts this work.

Maulana 'Abbas 'Ali Jeena  
President, Council of Muslim Theologians, South Africa  
(Jamiatul 'Ulama)

# Foreword to the First Printing

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's<sup>2</sup> 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.

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*

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<sup>2</sup> FTF: "First Thing First".



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# *Basics*

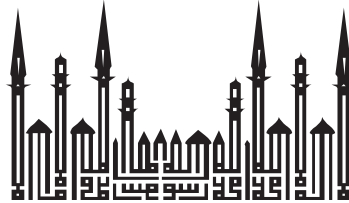
## *In this section:*

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- ✿ *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.”<sup>3</sup> 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

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