

In the sayings of the Prophet (p), Muslims find the embodiment of Quranic guidance. Of reforestation & land reclamation the Prophet (p) has said: “Whoever plants a tree & diligently looks after it until it matures & bears fruit is rewarded.” “If a Muslim plants a tree or sows a field & men & beasts & birds eat from it, all of it is charity on their part.” “Whoever brings dead land to life, cultivates wasteland, for them is a reward therein.”

The Quran & the sayings of the Prophet (p) form the legislative basis of Islamic law. Over the centuries, Muslim scholars have developed legislation regarding animal rights, bodies of water, forests, wildlife, land use, city growth, overgrazing & other aspects of earth’s finite resources & their management. Islamic law requires the establishment of areas within which development is prohibited to safeguard natural resources. These areas could border canals, wells & rivers, to protect aquifers & water from pollution. Most forests are designated as wilderness areas where trees cannot be logged. Responsible grazing is fundamental to Islamic environmental law. Pasture, woodland, wildlife & forests cannot be privately owned or monopolized. They are public property, **to be managed by the state for the common good of all.**

We must awaken to the challenge of preserving the global ecosystem, & Islamic scholars must illuminate the ecological principles of the Quran as they apply to contemporary environmental issues. The world now is undoubtedly more complex than it was a thousand years ago when the industrial revolution had not yet taken place and the earth’s resources had not yet been strained. Some Islamic environmental laws formulated at the height of Muslim civilization may now appear inadequate & simplistic. The point, however, is that **human laws are time bound**, while **divine guidance is timeless.**

The challenge facing scholars & scientists is to formulate on the basis of Quranic teachings laws that address environmental issues, from deforestation & soil erosion to drought & flood,

Take Pride As You Ride Keep Your Trash Inside



from the carrying capacity of a habitat to a land ethic, from the application of tech to the preservation of community & culture, from greenhouse effect to acid rain.

We need to bind **action to principle & ecology to faith.** Towards that end, we need scholars who will inspire us not only with knowledge & wisdom but also with strength & eloquence of the pen to act on the pressing ecological issues of our times. As rational beings with the capability of reason, we should take into account the full impact of our activities.

If we treat this earth like we are human hogs then it loses its benevolence & becomes hostile & works against us & then most of what we do will finally be dominated by fear. Our life will become a constant effort to counter this fear by looking for ways to control it or insure our life against it. Anxiety will be our daily bread. If however we trust the opposite, accepting that at the deepest level of reality some intimate kindness holds sway, life becomes a space where we may explore & taste hope & love, beauty & trust, every day. An opportunity to continuously open our lives to God’s grace & blessings. This is exactly the liberating perspective that those of us who claim to be believers, owe to the world. The gift of religion is that it parts the veil, returns us to the garden & tells us our primal experience was trustworthy. It reassures us that we live in a benevolent universe, and it is on our side. The universe, it reassures us, is radical grace.

Only when we live our lives with care and restraint as though our daily lives are sacred, can we add in the concept of a sacred nature, one that is part of us, integrated into our bodies, the land on which we walk and sleep, into the small and often unseen lives that surround us. We start there with sacred nature – with our water table and our dinners, with our yards and the trees that overhang our street. From there, we can reach out to those

special and transformative natural spaces in which have in the past had spiritual experiences, and to our churches and mosques, temples and shuls, where we have the chance in community to teach about and learn about and experience the collective agrarian history of our faiths. But at the beginning, nature starts where we are – it is literally and materially in us, and if we are to show reverence to it, we must begin at the beginning.

An international effort must be undertaken to confront ills that plague the earth. Our involvement should not be reactive & minimal. Let us humble ourselves before the mystery, the awesome force of creation & simplify our lives. Let us be reminded of the peril of hubris, & the forgetfulness of human limits. Based on observations at secular/religious functions all manner of people violate the memories of the Prophets (p) who preached: “**Cleanliness is next to Godliness.**”

We worship at the altar of supply & demand – Earth must supply whatever we demand; Our limitless lust for more demands unlimited Earth-supply. We treat the Earth as a hole we can dig from forever; We fail to see the Earth as a whole – & holy – Earth as Home – where the Human Room can be expanded only at the expense of the Flora-Fauna Room; where the Fossil-Fuel Room can be expanded only at the expense of the Polar-Ice Room; where the Gold-Silver Room can be expanded only at the expense of the Forest-River Room. This is a game with too high stakes; This is the time to learn from our mistakes; This is our call. Do whatever it takes to treat the Earth as Home where limited supply demands a limited demand; where one room’s gain is another room’s loss.

Housework makes the ground ready for the germination of family life. Care of the environment makes the earth into holy ground. The Torah, the Bible & the Quran instructs its followers with a job description similar to a noble janitor. **Why did you drop your garbage on the ground? You’re stupid...ok...Against stupidity God Himself contends in vain.** Littering is sinful as made clear in this Quranic verse (2:60) **Do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption...**

May you find in these words inspiration to better appreciate the Earth as a Spiritual Experience.

APPRECIATING NATURE AS A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

Environment

THE WHOLE EARTH WAS CREATED CLEAN & PURE. AS A SACRED PLACE OF WORSHIP.

PROPHET MUHAMMAD (PEACE)

“After all the animals are destroyed, the waters polluted & the last tree cut down, only then will you realize you cannot eat money.”

Old Native Indian saying.

The Islamic approach to the environment is holistic. Everything in creation is linked to everything else; whatever affects one thing ultimately affects everything. Man has been distilled from the essence of nature & so is inextricably bound to it. The Quran teaches that human need cannot justify **transgressing** the legitimate needs of other species. Man is dependent on a world he did **not** create, and therefore has **no** right to destroy. In the web of life, the smallest organism counts. “**Mastery of nature,**” with its implied one-sided benefits for man, is a concept foreign to Islam. Inherent in Quranic teaching is the notion that ecology is **farsighted economics**, that in the deepest sense, **ecology is religion.** The **spiritual environment** of man is unseen. We only faintly realize its vast importance. Yet this sphere of environment which is **the most potent**, is the one **most ignored.** It emphasizes the need for right living & pure thinking. It points to the necessity for bringing our spiritual nature into line with the highest good. By it we realize the great chain of love connecting all, and by the opening of the heart to the sublime influence of the spiritual realm, we shall see that true civilization means spiritualization, —a harmonious adaptation to the loftiest ideals. The **environmental crisis** is the result of a **spiritual crisis** within humanity. Only by being centred on God, can humanity be taught the virtue of “**Cleanliness is next to Godliness.**” Only religion can discipline the soul, to accept such a **blessed virtue!**

The Earth is a SACRED PLACE



CORRUPTION HAS APPEARED ON LAND & SEA AS AN OUTCOME OF WHAT MEN'S HANDS HAVE WROUGHT: AND SO HE WILL LET THEM TASTE THE EVIL OF SOME OF THEIR DOINGS, SO THAT THEY MIGHT RETURN TO THE RIGHT PATH

The above verse implies that destruction of the natural environment follows from **immoral & unethical use of natural resources**. The devastation of our world has been exacerbated, if not actually caused, by the reductionist view of nature that has been advanced by modern secular science. What is needed is the recovery of the truth to which the great, enduring religions all attest; namely that **nature is sacred**.

“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is **holy ground**.”(Exodus 3:5)

There are three views of nature: 1. “Nature is **spiritual or sacred in itself**” (immanent sacredness). 2. “Nature is sacred because it is created by God” (transcendent sacredness, a position with strong affinities to religion). 3. “Nature is important, but not **spiritual or sacred**” (nonsacredness, a position bearing affinities to the recent scientific worldview). Islam, totally supports position 2, and provides an ecological outlook that is practical as well as ethical, in terms of deforestation, air & water pollution, soil erosion, wildlife extinction & even toxic waste management.

Among the varied & complex reasons for disrespect of the earth, perhaps the most telling is that many of us are unaware of the environmental dictates of our religion. Quranic verses describing nature & natural phenomena **outnumber** verses dealing with sacraments & commandments. In fact, of more than 6,000 verses in the Quran, some 750, one eighth of the Book, exhort believers to reflect on nature, to study the relationship between living organisms and their environment, to make the best use of reason, to maintain the balance & proportion God has built into His creation. The earth's resources land, water, air, minerals, forests are available

for our use, but these gifts come from God with certain ethical restraints imposed on them. We may use them to meet our needs, but only in a way that **does not upset ecological balance** and that does not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Not knowing about stewardship & accountability, Quranic teachings as well as other religious teachings are reduced to narrow definitions of crime & punishment. The Quran is emphatic about protecting the environment. **The Islamic approach to the environment is holistic**...because the earth is a complex eco system.

Because of its ability to reason & think, humanity has been made the steward of God on earth. Nature is created on the principle of balance, and as a steward of God it is the human's responsibility to ensure that his or her actions do not disrupt this balance. Stewardship does not imply superiority over other living beings: because ownership belongs to God alone; stewardship invests humans with a **moral responsibility** in safeguarding God's creation.

Stewardship requires that humans learn to live in harmony with rather than work against nature. That is why **reflecting on nature and understanding its inner workings has been made the fundamental basis of knowledge in Islam**. Man can detect God's "signs" in all the natural phenomena & should, therefore, observe them better to understand "God's way," which is the Quranic term for "laws of nature." Thus "in the succession of night & day," "in the water that comes down from the sky, giving life to the earth after it had been lifeless," "in the change of the winds," "in the mountains towering above the earth," "in the hives of the bees & the flight of the birds," "in the wonder of the seed," "in the springs that gush forth from within the earth" in these Quranic verses, God reminds humankind that there are "**messages for those who reason & think**."

Several Quranic verses deal with the hydrological cycle & the fundamental role water plays in sustaining life on earth. In referring to the fertility of the soil, to the unique properties of fresh & sea water, to the course of rivers & the presence underground of springs & aquifers, and most significantly to the aquatic origin of

Be Part of the Solution Not Part of the Pollution



life, the Quran places water at the top of all the natural phenomena on earth. The miracle of water is emphasized in a particular verse where God, addressing those who may doubt the truth of resurrection, first gives the example of the growth of the fetus within the mother's womb, leading to the birth of a human being. The verse then concludes, "**If you are still in doubt as to resurrection, consider this: you can see the earth dry & lifeless & suddenly when we send down waters upon it, it stirs & swells & puts forth every kind of lovely plant!**" (22:5)

One of the great principles of ecology is diversity of life & the role it plays to make the earth habitable. Without the biotic diversity of microorganisms, plants & animals that share the planet with us, life as we know it could not exist. All living species have a right to live & flourish on earth, not because of their potential use to humans, but because their presence sustains the harmony & proportion of God's creation. This is expressed in the Quran thus: "**And the earth: we have spread it out wide & placed on it mountains firm, and caused life of every kind to grow on it in a balanced manner, and provided means of livelihood for you as well as for all living beings whose sustenance does not depend on you.**" (15:19)

Moral Responsibility: Man is only one of God's creations, existing side by side with other living beings. His life depends on other lives and energies and processes in an interwoven system of which he is only a part. Lest his arrogance lead him to believe that he represents the epitome of God's creation, the Quran reminds him that "**Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens & the earth.**" (40:57) By stressing that man is only a small part of the universe, the Quran points out the absurdity of the anthropocentric world-view. A diminishing biotic diversity whose principal cause is man changes his role from a steward to a predator, from a nurturer to a destroyer. One way for this fatal transition to occur is for man to accept a

conceptual division between the body and the soul, between the earthly and the holy. After all, if the human soul can aspire to God's grace without being troubled by the destruction wrought by human hands, what can be wrong in plundering the planet, in destroying the earth and its creatures?

Islam's stand on this point is clear: it does not recognize any schism between the body and the soul. In Islam, spirit and flesh are different aspects of one and the same reality – human life. A Muslim cannot hope for salvation in the "hereafter" if his "here" is torn with strife & greed; he cannot love God in Heaven if he hates His creation on earth.

A Double-Edged Sword: Certain forces tend to favour the rift between the body & soul. Technology is one. A complex technology places machines in the foreground of human existence and by its inherent dynamism gradually estranges man from nature and from himself. Technology is a double-edged sword & unless tempered by scale & balance can overwhelm man's spiritual consciousness. The Quran states: "**We bestowed on you from on high the ability to make use of iron, in which there is awesome power as well as a source of benefit for man.**" (57:25) The power inherent in natural elements, whether iron or uranium or silicon can, if harnessed for destructive rather than beneficial ends, destroy man's sensitivity towards other creatures. It is to warn man of this danger that the Quran symbolically stresses the potential "evil" of iron if put to wrong use. At one extreme, technology with its attendant mechanization reduces man to a cipher; at the other extreme, it breeds hubris. Knowledge that gives a **false sense** of sovereignty over God's creation cannot be pursued or morally defended. **Rational inquiry must be shaped by moral & ethical consideration; knowledge is to be sought for glorifying God & for fulfilling man's responsibility towards His trust.**



GOD CAUSES LIFE OF EVERY KIND TO GROW ON THE EARTH (QURAN 15:19) IN A BALANCED MANNER

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