

Water : An Islamic Perspective

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Salamun Alaikum !

The Beginning of Creation:

The Holy Quran says “It is He (Allah) who created the heavens and the earth in six periods – and His Throne (dominion) was [then] upon the **waters** that He may manifest you [to see] which of you is best in conduct....” (11:7)

All creation started from water by the Will of God. Water being the perennial substance of which the physical Universe, terrestrial and celestial was formed.

Ameerul Momineen Ali ibne Abi Talib (AS) in one of his sermons (Najul Balagha) says.....

“....When the Almighty created the openings of atmosphere, expanse of firmament and strata of winds, He flowed into it **water** whose waves were stormy and whose surges leapt one over the other. He loaded it on dashing wind and breaking typhoons, ordered them to shed it back (as rain), gave the wind control over the vigour of the rain, and acquainted it with its limitations. The wind blew under it while water flowed furiously over it.”

And God created Man:

The Quran mentions the creation of Adam (peace be upon him) from “*an extract of clay*” (23:12) ...”Who made good everything that He created, and He began the creation of man from dust” (32:7)

Ameerul Momineen Ali ibne Abi Talib (AS) when asked about the creation of Adam says “....he was made from hard, soft, sweet and sour earth, clay dripped in **water** till it got pure, and it was kneaded with moisturefor a fixed time and a known duration. Then Allah blew into it out of His Spirit whereupon it took the pattern of a human being with mind that governs him, intelligence which he makes use of, limbs that serve him,sagacity that differentiates between truth and untruth, tastes and smells, colours and species. He is a mixture of clays of different colours, cohesive materials, divergent contradictories and differing properties like heat, cold, softness and hardness.”

The one essential common factor in all creation is *Water*

Water is a fundamental of life. Without it man cannot survive for more than a few days. God has made every living thing dependent on water for its very existence.

Water is of profound importance in Islam. It is considered a blessing from God that gives and sustains life, and purifies humankind and the earth.

The Arabic word for water, *ma'*, occurs sixty-three times in the Quran. God's throne is described as resting on water, and Paradise is described as "*Gardens beneath which rivers flow.*" Dante Caponera points out, that in the Quran, the most precious creation after humankind is water. The life-giving quality of water is reflected in the verse, "*And Allah has sent down the water from the sky and therewith gives life to the earth after its death. There is a sign in this for a people who would listen.*" (The Bee 16:65) Not only does water give life, but every life is itself made of water: "*We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?*" (Anbiya 21:30)

All human beings rely on water for life and good health but, for Muslims, it enjoys special importance for its use in *wudu* (ablution, that is, washing before prayer) and *ghusl* (bathing). The benefit of the daily prayers, one of the Five Pillars of Islam, has itself been compared by the Prophet (Peace be upon him) to the cleansing action of water in the following *hadith* (tradition), "The similitude of five prayers is like an overflowing river passing by the gate of one of you in which he washes five times daily."

It is stated in *Misbahush Shari'ah* that Imam as Sadiq (AS) said : "When you intend purification and *wudu'* [ritual ablution], proceed to the water as you proceed to Allah's mercy, because Allah has made water the key to his proximity and supplication, and a guide to the court of His service. And, as Allah's mercy purifies the sins of the servants, similarly the outer filths are purified by water and by nothing else. Allah, the Exalted, says: '*And He it is Who sends the winds as good news heralding His mercy, and We send down purifying water from the sky.*' (Surah al-Furqan: 48).

Imam as Sadiq (AS) further states : Allah has given life, with water, to everything of the blessings of this world, likewise, He has made obedience the life of the hearts, out of His mercy and grace. Think of the clarity, softness, purity and blessing of water and of its tender mixing with everything. And learn a lesson from the Messenger of Allah (Peace be upon him) (who said): 'A sincere believer is like water'. Let your clearness with Allah, the Most High, be like the clearness of water as He sent it down from the sky and called it 'purifier' [*tahur*].

Purify your heart with fear of Allah [*taqwa*] and certitude [*yaqin*] as you cleanse your organs with water.”

The Water Cycle is described in the Holy Qur’an and Allah declares:

“And we send down water from the sky in due measure then we let it settle on the earth; and we have power to withdraw it, too.” (23:18).

The words ‘due measure’ are in essence the summary of **water cycle** referring to the amount of water vaporized into atmosphere, turned into the form rainfall, part of which goes underground and is available to man for use.

It was only in the 16th century A.D. that the idea of **rainwater** penetrating the subsoil was presented by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) and Bernard Palissy.

Pierre Pessault (1608-80) is considered to be the founder of the science of Hydrology. Edme Mariotte (1620-84) and the astronomer Edmond Halley (1656-1742) also contributed to the understanding of the water cycle. It is to the distinctive merit of Holy Qur’an that it described the complete water cycle in the most correct and scientific way, uninfluenced by any of the myths and theories prevalent at that time.

Rain is mentioned several times in the Quran and in Islamic Tradition is considered a “Mercy”. It is said that one’s prayers are heard and accepted when Allah blesses you with rain.

Man is warned in verse (Al-A’raf)7:56 not to bring corruption to the world and upset the balance of what Allah has set right, and in the following verses 7: 57 and 7:58 “It is He who sends forth the winds as harbingers of His mercy. When they bear [rain-] laden clouds, We drive them towards a dead land and send down water on it, and with it We bring forth all kinds of crops. Thus shall we raise the dead; maybe you take admonition.” “The good land – its vegetation comes out with the permission of its Lord, and as for that which is bad, it does not come out except sparsely. Thus do we paraphrase the signs variously for a people who give thanks.”

Thus through the imagery of **Rain** and the revival of dead earth Allah speaks of His Grace on those deserving of His mercy, who take heed and do not corrupt the earth, give thanks, He brings them into His fold once again in a revival.

Islam covers all aspects of human life. It regulates the relationships between God, humans, and nature. It is based on the recognition of the unity of the Creator and of humans’ submission to His will. Muslims believe that everything originates

from the One God, and everyone is responsible to Him. Humans are viewed as trustees (*khulafa*) and witnesses (*shahed*). Our role and responsibility is to ensure that **all resources, including water**, are used in a reasonable, equitable, and sustainable manner.

The law of the Quran by which man is guided is called 'Shariah' Shariah literally means "**A path to life giving water**". In fact, the word *Yarrah* (i.e. the root of the Hebrew word Torah) means precisely the same thing. Therefore Shariah is ingrained in the Abrahamic tradition.

Before it came to mean simply "law," the Arabic word *sharia* denoted the law of water (Mallat 1995). It is, therefore, not surprising that a detailed examination of the Quran and the *hadith* shows that Islam makes a remarkable number of specific statements about water management.

Muslims believe that God has honoured humans with authority over the countless things that He has created. Everything has been harnessed for us. We have been endowed with the power to subdue them and make them serve our objectives. This superior position gives humans authority over resources, including water. However, this authority must be guided by a sense of responsibility and accountability toward both living creatures and nature. Humans should not waste resources on fruitless ventures nor should they unnecessarily damage them. When humans employ resources in their service, they should employ the best and the least injurious methods of deriving benefit from these resources

Many verses in the Quran illustrate the value of water, how was it formed, and its vulnerability: for example: "*We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?*" and "*Say: Tell me should your water some morning sink (into the underground earth), who then bring you clear flowing water?*" (*Al-Mulk 67:30*)

Islam urges all members of society to take an active and positive attitude toward public concerns.

Each has a social responsibility to conserve water and prevent water pollution. Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water. Likewise, in Islam the responsibility for taking care of resources is not divided by gender. Both men and women are considered as caretakers of resources. They act as God's deputies on earth. They both enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. As such there is a responsibility towards the preservation of this vital resource.

The story of Hajar wife of the Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) tells of her search for water between Safa and Marwa, for her son Ishmael. This forms part of the rituals of the Haj pilgrimage in Mecca and has made these places into sites of remembrance for Muslims.

The miraculous spring of water called **Zam-Zam** till this day pours forth water for the millions of pilgrims at Haj and throughout the year. The quality of water is so perfect and balanced that tests have been done by scientists to determine why the quality and ingredients do not change and they have failed to know the reason.

Principle 4 of the Dublin Statement on Water Management states that “Water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good.” Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) declared that water should be, together with pasture and fire, the common entitlement of all Muslims. This is why, in many modern Muslim countries, water legislation considers that water resources belong to the whole community, that is, the state or the public domain (Caponera 1992). Based on this notion, public water in its natural state (large lakes and rivers) cannot be sold. Access to water is a right of the community.

As in Christianity and Judaism, in Islam humankind has the first right to the resources that God has provided for his creation. It is well accepted by Islamic scholars that the priority of water use rights is: first, *haq al shafa* or *shirb*, the law of thirst or the right of humans to drink or quench their thirst; second, *haq al shafa*, the right of cattle and household animals; and third, the right of irrigation. However, the environment has clear and unmistakable rights in Islam.

There is no contradiction between what Islam says about water management and the emerging international consensus on the issue, as reflected by recent accords such as the Dublin Principles or the UN Water Convention. In fact, the Islamic water management principles are not unique. Some of the same principles could be derived by studying other faiths, their holy books, and the lives of their prophets. As one delves into Islam, one encounters values common not only to the other two Abra-hamic religions, Christianity and Judaism, but also to many other world-views and religions.

God informs human beings of the rights of animals by comparing them (animals) to humans: “*There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth, nor a being that flies on its wings, but (forms part of) communities like you.*” Animals cannot be allowed to die of thirst, and the water that remains after humans have quenched their thirst must be given to them. The Prophet (Peace be upon him) said, “there

is a reward for serving any animate (living) being,” and “He who digs a well in the desert . . . cannot prevent the animals from slaking their thirst at this well.” The immense value of giving water to any creature is mentioned in several authentic traditions.

The Quran notes that the gift of water is for flora as well: “*vegetation of all kinds*” and “*various colours*” are nourished by rainwater that God sends down.

These verses support the statement that water is made available by God so that all life should receive support according to its needs, including humans, animals, and plants (Yusuf Ali 1977, n. 3107). As Amery notes, nonhuman species have rights to sufficient water that is of “good” quality because the water has to be suitable for “nourishing vegetation” and for drinking by animals.

Because Islam arose and developed in a desert area where water resources were extremely important, Muslim sources and scholars have much to say about the ownership and transfer of water and of land tenure. The environment, however, was not the only reason for this. It was also connected with the nature of Islam as a monotheistic religion that sought to regulate the behaviour of humans according to the commands of Allah.

Misuse of the resource, bad conduct and disobeying God’s laws will also have consequences. The Quran mentions in several places the punishment for corruption, eating away an orphan’s inheritance, eating and drinking of forbidden things, Greed and wastage of God given resources. The punishment being a drink of boiling water like molten brass (*Hameem*) in Hell.

So to those who love the world I recall the words of: The seventh Imam, Musa ibn Ja’far [as], who said: “The likeness of this world is as the water of the sea. However much (water) a thirsty person drinks from it, his thirst increases so much so that the water kills him.” *Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 78, p. 311*

And where punishment is mentioned there is also reward for the good, for the pious and God-fearing, the charitable, the humble, who shall abide in Heaven where rivers flow that are whiter than milk, sweeter than honey : *Kawthar, Tasnim, Salsabil.....The reward for quenching the thirst of a traveler, a guest, a visitor is that on the day of Judgement he or she shall not remain thirsty.t*

As the month of Moharram begins tomorrow you will see at many places along the streets of the city Pots of cool drinking water or cool *sherbat* being given to any passerby who wishes to drink. This is in memory of Imam Hussain (AS) the grandson of the Prophet (peace be upon him), and his family and companions who were brutally martyred at Karbala on the 10th of Moharram by the Ummayyad tyrant Yazid ibne Muawiya and his men after water had been denied to Imam

Hussain, his family and companions. Water that fundamental right given to all in Islam even during a state of war. Water that had quenched the thirst of the very same enemy troops earlier by Imam Hussain, when they marched to stop him and removed his camp from the banks of the Euphrates.

That magnanimous gesture of Imam Hussain (AS) so touched the heart of one enemy commander named Hur, that on the eve of the battle that followed his conscience and his faith in truth made him join forces with the Imam, thus he too died with the seventy one others as a martyr for truth and justice, a fight against an oppressive debauched tyrant.

A drink of water offered, a gesture of kindness, has it's own reward and could mean the difference between Heaven and Hell for some.

Conclusion : Water as a social good

- Water is first and foremost a social good in Islam – a gift from God and a part of, and necessary for, sustaining all life.
- Water belongs to the community as a whole – no individual literally owns water.
- The first priority for water use is access to drinking water of acceptable quantity and quality to sustain human life, and every human being has the right to this basic water requirement.
- The second and third priorities for water are for domestic animals and for irrigation.
- Humankind is the steward of water on earth.
- The environment (both flora and fauna) has a very strong and legitimate right to water and it is vital to protect the environment by minimizing pollution. Individuals, organizations, and states are liable for harm that they have caused to the environment or to the environmental rights of others, including water use rights.
- Water resources must be managed and used in a sustainable way.
- Sustainable and equitable water management ultimately depends upon following universal values such as fairness, equity, and concern for others.

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Mr. Abbas Muljiani – Muscat, Oman : for guiding me to the correct sources