

Care of the Earth :An Islamic Perspective

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Introduction

Environment protection is an important aspect of Islam. Being stewards of the Earth, it is the responsibility of human beings to care for the environment in a proactive manner. In Islam man has been granted this stewardship (khilafah) on the earth. There is a definite purpose behind the creation of different species, be it plants or animals. Muslims are encouraged to reflect on the relationship between living organisms and their environment and to maintain the ecological balance created by Allah. Protection of the environment is essential to Islamic beliefs and mankind has the responsibility to ensure safe custody of the environment.

The Islamic perspective on environment protection reflects a positive image about Islam

Throughout the universe, the divine care for all things and all-pervading wisdom in the elements of creation may be perceived, attesting to the All-Wise Creator ALLAH- The most beneficial and merciful. The Glorious Quran has made it clear that each thing and every creature in the universe, whether known to man or not, performs two major functions: a *religious function* in so far as it evidences the Maker's presence and infinite wisdom, power, and grace; and a *social function* in the service of man and other created beings. God's wisdom has ordained that His creatures shall be of service to one another. Over exploitation, abuse, misuse, destruction, and pollution of natural resources are all transgressions against the divine scheme. Because narrow-sighted self-interest is always likely to tempt men to disrupt the dynamic equilibrium set by God, the protection of all natural resources from abuse is a mandatory duty. In the divine scheme by which all creatures are made to be of service to one another, God's wisdom has made all things of service to mankind. But nowhere has God indicated that they are created only to serve human beings. On the contrary, Muslim legal scholars have maintained that the service of man is not the only purpose for which they have been created. With regard to God's saying

God declares that He created His creations for the children of Adam; it is well known that God in His great wisdom has exalted purposes in them other than the service of man, and greater than the service of man. However, He makes clear to the children of Adam what benefits there are in these creatures and what bounty He has bestowed upon mankind.

The approach of Islam towards the use of natural resources was brilliantly put forward by the Fourth Caliph Hazrat Ali ibn Abi-Talib (RA) who said “Partake of it gladly so long as you are the benefactor, not a despoiler; a cultivator, not a destroyer. All human beings as well as animals and wildlife enjoy the right to share Earth’s resources. Man’s abuse of any resource is prohibited as the juristic principle says ‘What leads to the prohibited is itself prohibited’”

1. Water

The role of water in the environment and the Islamic injunction for conservation of this vital element fundamental to the preservation and continuation of life. God has made water the basis and origin of life. God says: **“We made from water every living thing...” (Quran 21:30)** Plants, animals, and man all depend on water for their existence and for the continuation of their lives. God has said:

“And We send down pure water from the sky, thereby to bring to life a dead land and slake the thirst of that which We have created- cattle and men in multitudes.” (Quran 25:48-49)

Owing to the importance of water as the basis of life, God has made its use the common right of all living beings and all human beings. All are entitled to use it without monopoly, usurpation, despoilment, wastage, or abuse. God commanded with regard to the people of Thamud and their camel,

The long experience of Muslim jurists in the allocation of water rights in arid lands has given rise to an outstanding example of the sustainable use of a scarce resource; an example which is of increasing relevance in a world where resources which were once abundant are becoming progressively more scarce

2. Air

“And He it is Who sends the winds as tidings heralding His grace: until when they have raised a heavy-laden cloud, We drive it to a dead land and cause the rain to descend upon it, and thereby bring forth fruits of every kind.” (Quran 7:57)

Since the atmosphere performs all these biological and social functions, its conservation, pure and unpolluted, is an essential aspect of the conservation of life itself which is one of the fundamental objectives of Islamic law.

3. The Land and Soil

Like air and water, the land and soil are essential for the perpetuation of our lives and the lives of other creatures. God has declared in the Quran:

“And the earth He has established for living creatures.” (Quran 55:10)

From the minerals of the earth are made the solid constituents of our bodies, as well as those of all the living animals and plants. God has said in the Quran:

“And among His signs is that He has created you from dust; then behold, you are humans scattered widely.” (Quran 30:20)

He has also made the land our home and the home of all terrestrial beings.

“And God has made you grow, as a plant from the earth; then to it He returns you, and He will bring you forth a new...” (Quran 71:17-18)

God has made the land a source of sustenance and livelihood for us and other living creatures: He has made the soil fertile to grow the vegetation upon which we and all animal life depend.

If we would truly give thanks to the Creator, we are required to maintain the productivity of the soil, and not expose it to erosion by wind and flood; in building, farming, grazing, forestry, and mining, we are required to follow practices which do not bring about its degradation but preserve and enhance its fertility. For to cause the degradation of this gift of God, upon which so many forms of life depend, is to deny His tremendous favors. And because any act that leads to its destruction and degradation of life on earth, such acts are categorically forbidden.

4. Plants and Animals.

Islam emphasizes all measures for the survival and perpetuation of these creatures so that they can fully perform the functions assigned to them. The absolute destruction of any species of animals or plant by man cannot be justified; nor should any be harvested at a rate in excess of its natural regeneration. This applies to hunting and fishing, forestry and wood-cutting for timber and fuel, grazing, and all other utilization of resources. It is imperative that the genetic diversity of living beings be preserved - both for their own sake and for the good of mankind and all other creatures.

10 Green *Ahadith* Ecological Advice From Prophet Muhammad

Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, is one of the most, if not the only one who reached a pinnacle of success by not only verbally teaching, but stringently applying Islamic principles of ecological welfare. His concern for preserving nature was so consistent that history reports the only time he cut down plants were the palm trees in Madina to impede the Jewish tribe BanuNadhir.

The Merciful Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said;

- Show mercy to those on earth, and He (Allah) will show mercy unto you in the Heavens. (Abu Dawood and Thirmidhi)

1) **A believer is like a growing tree**

Prophet Muhammad was teaching new Muslims that their life on the path of faith must always progress and beware of climatic changes, just like a young tree. There will be tough times when the storm seems to never end. But patience and persistence in planting roots no matter what the trouble, will heal both one's own branches and protect the nearest plants.

2) **Plant a tree even if it's your last deed**

"If the Hour (the day of Resurrection) is about to be established and one of you was holding a palm shoot, let him take advantage of even one second before the Hour is established to plant it." - Al-Albani.

3) **Planting trees is a renewable source of reward**

"If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift (*sadaqah*) for him." - Imam Bukhari.

4) **Conserve resources even when used for routine rituals**

Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, happened to pass by a Companion, Sa'd, as he was performing ablution (*wudhu*) next to a river. At this, the Prophet said, "Sa'd what is this squandering?"

Sa'd replied: "Can there be an idea of squandering (*israf*) in ablution?"

The Prophet said: "Yes, even if you are by the side of a flowing river." - Ibn Majah.

5) **Keeping the environment sanitary maintains the community**

Hygiene and cleanliness (*tahara*) is so integral to Islam that it is actually a major sub-branch of Muslim belief. Without physical hygiene, prayers are

broken. Without clean facilities pollution ruins cities, and without any effort to improve one's own purity, it becomes more difficult to prevent external corruptions like littering.

6) Thus, Prophet Muhammad said about street clean-ups,

“Removing harmful things from the road is an act of charity (*sadaqah*).”
Narrated by Abu Dharr Al-Ghafari.

7) Say no to over-consumption (or at least reduce it)-

Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas reported that the Prophet said, “The believer is not he who eats his fill while his neighbor is hungry.” Authenticated by Al-Albani

8) Eat a little less every day

Excessive eating is abhorred in Islam. For the days of Ramadan, fasting is precisely a command in order to learn control and when to say ‘no’. Prophet Muhammad did not encourage eating a three course meal nor a heavy meal. Every meal should be shared between two and choosing between take-outs and home-cooked, a healthier diet is always the better option (*less meat, more greens*). In the Islamic law system (Shariah), a person should stop eating as soon as the hunger pangs cease.

“Nothing is worse than a person who fills his stomach. It should be enough for the son of Adam to have a few bites to satisfy his hunger. If he wishes more, it should be: One-third for his food, one-third for his liquids, and one-third for his breath.” Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah.

9) Consider recycling and fixing before buying new items

When asked about how the Prophet used to live in his house, the Prophet’s wife, ‘A’ishah, said that he used to repair his own shoes, sew his clothes and

carry out all such household chores done without complaint or want for more. (Authenticated by Al-Albani).

The idea behind this was to show Muslims that menial tasks (*mehna*) were not degrading for God's Prophet. Reusing and repairing things instead of always buying new is not a sign of poverty, they are a sign of power. By performing household duties, the Prophet was saying we can build foundations on less 'stuff', we are in control of what we consume and we don't need more.

10) Animals should be cared for:

"A man felt very thirsty while he was on the way, there he came across a well. He went down the well, quenched his thirst and came out. Meanwhile he saw a dog panting and licking mud because of excessive thirst. He said to himself, "This dog is suffering from thirst as I did." So, he went down the well again, filled his shoe with water, held it with his mouth and watered the dog. Allah appreciated him for that deed and forgave him." The Companions said, "O Allah's Messenger! Is there a reward for us in serving the animals?" He replied: "There is a reward for serving any living being."

- Imam Bukhari.

- One should provide the needs of any animals under his/her care, if a person causes an animal to die of starvation or thirst is punished by Allah in the hell." (Bukhari and Muslim Sharif)
- When people asked, O Messenger of Allah, is there a reward in doing good to the animals? He (peace be upon him) said, "There is a reward in doing good to every living thing." (Bukhari and Muslim Sharif)

The universal and the most visionary Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) forbade;

- To kill animals or birds for fun or mere sports (Bukhari and Muslim Sharif)
- To light a fire on an anthill (Bukhari& Muslim Sharif)

- To cut trees that provides valuable shelter to humans or animals in the desert / jungle (Abu Dawood)
- To waste water even for ablution for prayers (Bukhari)
- He ordered a man who had taken the nestlings of a bird from their nest to return them whence he got them, to their mother which was trying to protect them.” (Abu Dawood)

Conclusion

Muslims, around the world, have an obligation to protect the environment and conserve resources by joining the original Environmental Protection Agency on earth founded by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In other words, just believing is not enough, do some thing about it. Protect the environment from all forms of corruptions and pollutants. It is in everyone's interest, Muslims and non Muslims, to follow the most proactive and the pioneer of environmental protection movement, the final Messenger of Allah, Muhammad (peace be upon him). May we get some wisdom. Amen. Those who conserve in this world will get it back, in abundance, in the Heavens.

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