

Environmental Ethics in Islam

Sources of Islamic Environmental Ethics: links to sacred text and writing

Qur'an:

The primary source for guidance for Muslims in all areas is the Qur'an, which Muslims believe is the direct Word of God. The Qur'an contains over 650 references to ecology as well as important principles which are able to be applied to the environment.

Sunnah

The sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad^{pbuh} (Sunnah and Hadith) are the secondary source of guidance for Muslims. It also contains numerous important ecological guidelines. There is an abundance of *hadith* (sayings of Prophet Muhammad^{pbuh}) concerning plants, trees, land cultivation, irrigation, crops, livestock, grazing, water distribution and treatment of animals.

Shari'ah Law

Shari'ah law includes many teachings explaining how to apply Qur'anic principles and guidelines of Prophet Muhammad^{pbuh}. Collectively, the sources of authority in Islam provide clear teaching and direction to Muslims in their relationship with the environment.

Key principles of Islamic Environmental Ethics

Tawhid

The fundamental belief in Islam is *tawhid*, which affects every component of Islam, including environmental ethics. *Tawhid* is God's Unity and Oneness and includes not ascribing any form of partnership with God. *Tawhid*, means that God is the Owner and Creator of everything in the universe.

"To God belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth" (Qur'an, 4:126).

This includes the human being, which is part of this interdependent universe as all is created by God.

The Qur'an also says that everything that is in the heavens and the earth praises God:

"Glorify Him and there is not a thing but glorifies His praise. But you understand not their glorification" (Qur'an, 17:44).

"See thou not that to God bow down in worship all things that are in the heavens and on earth, - the sun, the moon, the stars; the hills, the trees, the animals; and a great number among Mankind" (Qur'an, 22:18).

"And the herbs and the trees – both (alike) bow in adoration" (Qur'an, 55:6).

Everything is considered to be praising God because they are following the commandments set by God, such as a tree follows the commandment to grow into a tree and the bee obeys God's command to pollinate plants. When a Muslim considers that a

tree praises God and if animals praise God, it would lead them to carefully consider their treatment of these resources and give thanks for any use he/she benefits from them.

Ayat – Signs of Allah

The word *ayat*, which means signs, is used in the Qur'an for both Creation and the verses of the Qur'an. This gives them equal status, both as signs for human beings to read and understand. By describing nature as signs of God in the Qur'an, He is instructing us to reflect on them to learn about God's *tawhid*, His Attributes and about the connectivity of the universe. There are many examples in the Qur'an where God mentions the natural environment as a sign for human beings to come to belief in God. The wonder of the natural environment and the interconnection points to the existence of God, to understand his Names and Attributes and demonstrate His *tawhid*.

And it is He who spread out the earth, and set thereon mountains standing firm and (flowing) rivers: and fruit of every kind He made in pairs: He draws the night as a veil over the Day. Behold, verily in these things there are signs for those who think and reflect! (Qur'an 13:3).

It is He who sends down rain from the sky: from it you drink, and out of it (grows) the vegetation on which you feed your cattle. With it He produces for you corn, olives, date-palms, grapes and every kind of fruit. Behold, verily in these things there are signs for those who think and reflect! (Qur'an, 16:10-11).

All of Creation points to the Divine Creator and allows us to learn about God's Attributes. Every entity contains a meaning greater than itself, as part of a whole, similar to a letter in a word. This gives meaning to the entity by reflecting on the interdependence of the universe. For example, a tree seen independently is simply a tree. Yet when seen in relation to the greater meaning it is a means of shelter for animals, shade, a source of oxygen and demonstrates the Intelligence and Wisdom of Allah, as well as Him being able to create beautifully. Walking in nature, seeing the trees, the wind, the birds, the waves of water and the beauty of sunrise allows this reflection on God. It also allows us to reflect on the role of human beings within Creation. Even thorns, which are perceived to be ugly serve their duty as protectors of the plant and hence make them beautiful in essence. Anything in nature is be a sign and a means of reflection on God.

Balance

Recognition of God's *tawhid* means recognition that God created the universe in perfect balance and measure, so it should not be altered by human beings.

"Verily, all things have We created in proportion and measure" (Qur'an, 54:49).

God tells human beings not to disturb this balance;

"And the sky has He raised high, and has devised (for all things) a balance, so that you might never transgress the balance: weigh, therefore (your deeds) with equity, and do not upset the balance" (Qur'an, 55:7-9).

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