

# Resource Guide:

## Islam and the Environment

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Islam tries to provide guidance for one to live righteously in every aspect of his or her life. This includes coexisting righteously with the most common encounter of everyone's day—the air, the ground, and food. Here are verses from the Qu'ran that show in some way why the environment of the Earth around us and all of its inhabitants are equally worthy of respect and justice and should not be subject to our abuse. Islamic teachings also show why climate change causes such huge moral and ethical stress, since its effects are widespread, hurting the earth and all the species that dwell on it, including humans.

### Scriptural Quotes

*“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. Nothing have we omitted From the Book, and they (all) Shall be gathered to their Lord In the end.” (6:38)*

This verse shows how close animals are to ourselves. They will also be “gathered to their Lord” and hence have a soul. It is the duty of a loyal and faithful Muslim to not mistreat any being and try to care for it when it is in need, as we should do for other humans as well.

*“The seven heavens and the earth, And all beings therein, Declare His glory: There is not a thing But celebrates His praise; And yet ye understand not How they declare His glory! Verily He is Oft-Forbearing, Most Forgiving!” (17:44)*

*“Seest thou not that it is God Whose praises all beings In the heavens and on earth Do celebrate, and the birds (Of the air) with wings Outspread? Each one knows Its own (mode of) prayer And praise. And God Knows well all that they do.” (24:41)*

The key importance of these verses is that all of God's creatures glorify and worship him. If we are heedless and arrogant in our treatment of these creatures, we would be treating these sound, pure beings unjustly.

*“Assuredly the creation Of the heavens And the earth Is a greater (matter) Than the creation of men: Yet most men understand not.” (40:57)*

This is a great humbling verse. Humans are not the only beings who traverse this planet, or even this universe. We are all part of this great intertwining system, and we should treat what we interact with in a very respectful manner.

*“It is He who produceth Gardens, with trellises And without, and dates, And tilth with produce Of all kinds, and olives And pomegranates, Similar (in kind) And different (in variety): Eat of their fruit In their season, but render The dues that are proper On the day that the harvest Is gathered. But waste not By excess: for God Loveth not the wasters.” (6:141)*

One concept in Islam that resonates quite strongly, and which can have deep implications in our time, is the prohibition of wasteful behavior. The sole purpose of one’s life is to do good deeds on this earth and waste never brings one closer to God. Yusuf Ali provides eloquent commentary on this verse: “See what magnificent means God provides in nature for the sustenance of all His creatures, because He loves them all. Enjoy them in moderation and be grateful” (Ali 331).

*“And the earth We have spread out (Like a carpet); set thereon Mountains firm and immovable; And produced therein all kinds of things in due balance. And We have provided therein Means of subsistence,—for you And for whose sustenance Ye are not responsible.” (15:19-20)*

Ali gives a very thorough explanation of this verse: “Majesty, order, beauty, and harmony are shown in all God’s Creation, but especially in the heavens.... And every kind of thing is produced on the earth in due balance and measure. The mineral kingdom supports the vegetable, and they in their turn support the animal, and there is a link of mutual dependence between them. Excess is eliminated. The waste of one is made the food of another, and vice versa. And this is in an infinite chain of gradation and interdependence.... We provide for them [other beings on earth] also, as they are Our creatures.... But there is due order and balance in the economy of Our universal Plan” (Ali 640).

### Hadith of the Prophet

The next main source for Muslims after the Qu’ran are the Hadith, or sayings of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh). A few can be summarized and expanded upon as follows:

Man’s responsibility to God is to always maintain humility. Therefore, even when all hope is lost for mankind, one should sustain nature’s growth. For instance, one hadith proclaims that even when it’s the end of time, if you have a seed in your hand, you should plant it. The Prophet believed that nature remains good in itself, even if man does not benefit from it. Similarly, humans are meant to share the earth’s resources. The Prophet said, “Muslims share alike in three things—water, herbage, and fire,” and he considered it a sin to withhold water from the thirsty. “No one can refuse surplus water without sinning against Allah and against man” (Mishkat al Masabih).

The Prophet understood that there were certain limits that should not be transgressed by human beings. The earth is a sacred home for many servants of God and should not be

abused by humans. It is said that Prophet Mohammed, in the Raid of Mu'tah, said, "Never kill a woman, a weak infant, or a debilitated old person; nor burn palms, uproot trees, or pull down houses!" (Islamic Web 2006). It is significant that the Prophet explicitly protected trees from human destruction.

"Don't make your stomach a grave yard of innocent birds and animals" (Jabir 2001-2005). This saying of the Prophet depicts how in Islam, one is supposed to lead a balanced life. One should not overly eat meat (i.e., kill animals in an exuberant amount) but one is certainly allowed to consume them.

### An Overview of the Islamic Perspective

There are three key principles of the Prophet's philosophy of nature. They are based on Qu'ranic teachings and concepts of *tawhid* (unity), *khalifa* (stewardship), and *amana* (trust).

The first principle is *tawhid*, which is the oneness of God. This is a cornerstone of the Islamic faith. It essentially means that there is one absolute Creator and that each person is responsible solely to him for their actions. "For, unto God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth; and, indeed, God encompasses everything" (4:126). God's knowledge and power cover everything; therefore, abusing any of his creations, whether a living being or a natural resource, is a sin. Also, all of God's creations are equal before God, and the Prophet maintained that animals, land, forests, and watercourses should have rights (35:27-28). All of God's creations are servants and signs of Him, and will each be called forth before God on the Day of Judgement just as humans will (45:3-5). In that we are all equal, and if we love God, surely we should love and sustain all of His creations.

The two other principles, *khalifa* and *amana*, emerge from the principle of *tawhid*. The Quran explains that human beings have a privileged position among God's creations and are therefore chosen as *khalifas*, or "vice-regents." Therefore, mankind has the responsibility of caring for God's earthly creations. This encompasses every single human being on the earth. However, it is important to stress that the Qu'ran also warns humans against arrogance because we are no better than other creatures (6:38).

The Prophet also maintains that God's creations on Earth—animals, plants, water, land—were not created for mankind, and though he may use these resources, he can never own them. Land ownership is allowed, but only if man uses that land; once he ceases to use it, he has to part with that possession.

### Discussion Questions

1. Think about the burial system in Islam. In what ways is it destructive or conducive to the earth? (see <http://islam.about.com/cs/elderly/a/funerals.htm> for information about Islamic burials)
2. In the Qu'ran, weather patterns (thunder, rain, sunshine, etc.) are referred to many times. Can it be said that each of these weather patterns signals a certain meaning? How would that show that Islam tries to link one with the environment? Why would God relate these natural weather patterns to lessons he'd like to guide us with?

3. Try to think of ways that one is remembering God by conserving the environment.
4. Why has God created so many useful natural resources for mankind? What imperative do humans have to protect and maintain Earth's environment?

### Further Resources

#### **Web sites:**

Forum on Religion and Ecology: Islam  
<http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/religion/islam/index.html>

<http://www.islamonline.net/english/Contemporary/2003/02/Article02.shtml>

<http://www.islamonline.net/english/Contemporary/2002/08/Article02.shtml>

<http://nursistudies.com/turkishh/teblig.php?tno=364>

<http://nursistudies.com/turkishh/teblig.php?tno=363>

<http://nursistudies.com/turkishh/teblig.php?tno=365>

#### **Books:**

Foltz, Richard. 2006. *Animals in Islamic Traditions and Muslim Cultures*. Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications.

Foltz, Richard, Azizan Baharuddin, and Frederick M. Denny, eds. 2003. *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Divinity School, Center for the Study of World Religions.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. 1996. *Religion and the Order of Nature*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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2. [http://72.14.253.104/search?q=cache:uC6M-FOT-HwJ:islamicweb.com/begin/jihad\\_misconception.htm+%22pull+down+houses%22+%22burn+palms%22&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=1&ie=UTF-8](http://72.14.253.104/search?q=cache:uC6M-FOT-HwJ:islamicweb.com/begin/jihad_misconception.htm+%22pull+down+houses%22+%22burn+palms%22&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=1&ie=UTF-8)  
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[http://64.233.167.104/search?q=cache:yg9MwFPw4\\_cJ:www.veda.harekrsna.cz/bhaktiyoga/islamveg.htm+stomach+graveyard+prophet+islam+animals&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=2](http://64.233.167.104/search?q=cache:yg9MwFPw4_cJ:www.veda.harekrsna.cz/bhaktiyoga/islamveg.htm+stomach+graveyard+prophet+islam+animals&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=2) (accessed December 13, 2006).