WATER, ECOLOGY, AND THE JORDAN RIVER IN ISLAM

A sourcebook for educators and community leaders

ECOPEACE / FRIENDS OF THE EARTH MIDDLE EAST (FoEME)
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‘We made from water every living thing’

Quran 21:30
WATER, ECOLOGY, AND THE JORDAN RIVER IN ISLAM
Dear Friends,

This document is a compilation of writings about the Jordan River in the Muslim tradition, about the sacredness of water, and about the profound connection between spiritual faith and care for the natural world. We hope that you will use some of these materials to create inspiring talks, sermons, or lessons, and to engage your congregation, community, or class in the campaign to revive the Jordan River.

At the beginning of the booklet you will find three specially commissioned pieces of writing about the state of the river and the role of the Muslim community in its rehabilitation. You are welcome to use these works as the basis for your own presentations or sermons, or to adapt them to suit your audience. You will also find relevant texts from the Holy Quran, as well as from Hadith and Sunna, and also Islamic declarations and essays on ecology.

We encourage you to treat this as a working document: to annotate it, to select what is most illuminating for your own teaching, and to enrich it through your own knowledge and insight. We’ve left some pages blank for you to add notes and cuttings. For the next edition, we’re planning to develop a section of questions and discussion topics that educators and leaders can use to engage their students and communities. We would welcome your contributions as we develop this sourcebook.

With gratitude,

EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East
November 2013
One of the beautiful features of Islam, one not fully appreciated by some of its adherents, is its ready acceptance of all of the Prophets and Messengers of God who preceded Muhammad. Hence, Muslims view Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and many others as Prophets of Islam. We read in the Qur’an, “We surely sent revelation unto you, as We sent it unto Noah and the Prophets succeeding him. We sent revelation to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the Tribes, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, Solomon, and unto David we gave the Psalms (4:163).”

Hence, when Muslims read of those events transpiring in the lives of Abraham, Joshua, Lot, John the Baptist or Jesus in and around the area of the Jordan River, we feel as if we are reading Islamic history and we experience an intimate historical connection to the river and its surrounding lands. That connection is only strengthened when we reflect on the fact that the Jordan River is part of the blessed precincts surrounding the “Farthest Mosque” (Qur’an 18:1), and its terminal point is the Dead Sea, a place many Muslim exegetes opine is the area referred to in the Qur’an (30:3) as Adna al-‘Ard (the lowest land).

Although the Jordan River contains no specific import in the life and career of the Prophet Muhammad, some of his most prominent companions are buried in the heart of its valley. We can mention among them Abu ʿUbaydah b. Jarrah; Muʿadh b. Jabal; Shurhabil b. Hasana; ʿAmr b. Abi Waqqas; and Darar b. al-Azwar. The specifically “Muslim” history connecting the lives of these individuals to the area, along with the Qur’anic references mentioned earlier, only deepen its significance in the hearts of Muslims.

The Jordan also has tremendous symbolic value. Formed by the meeting of two of the earth’s tectonic plates, the river has long been a meeting place for different societies, cultures and religions. Since the advent of Islam, the lands surrounding the Jordan River have been a space where Jews, Christians and Muslims have been able to not only peacefully coexist, generally, but to create a vibrant and dynamic shared culture. Sadly, in more recent times, a lack of coordination and cooperation between the states which have emerged in the area has resulted in too much water being diverted or pumped out of the river and far too much sewage and other pollutants deposited into what remains of her dissipating flow.
Saving the Jordan River will require the joint effort of all of the people, states and religious communities surrounding her. If we can all come together to do just that, perhaps a vibrant river, full with life and surrounded by the lush vegetation that once filled the adjoining valley can revive our hearts and alert us to the fact that there are interests that transcend those of our respective nations.

“There are interests that transcend those of our respective nations”

There are human, moral and ecological interests that we can ill afford to marginalize as we have done for much of the 20th Century. If we can bring those interests to the fore and on their bases begin a meaningful restoration of the Jordan River, perhaps the area will once again be a meeting place; one symbolizing our ability to transcend conflict through a purposeful pursuit of the common good.
REVIVING THE JORDAN:
A CHALLENGE FOR YOUNG MUSLIMS

Dr. Husna Ahmed

Dr. Husna Ahmad (OBE) has a PhD in environmental law from London University. She authored the book ‘Islam and Water: the Hajjar Story’, and co-authored the ‘Green Guide for Hajj.’ She is the Secretary General of the World Muslim Leadership Forum, and sits on the advisory Board of the largest mosque in Europe [East London Mosque]. She has recently been appointed by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) as Adviser on Islamic Programmes. In 2010 she was awarded an OBE by the Queen for services to disadvantaged communities in the UK through her work as the CEO of Faith Regen Foundation.

The following is a talk addressed to young people within the Islamic community.

Bismillah al-Rahman al-Raheem, In the name of Allah the most Gracious the most Merciful,

As-Salaamu Alaikum.

It is wonderful to be with you today to share some thoughts about our precious planet and what part you and I can play to affect positive change.

You - young Muslims, men and women - are our future. Your intentions, deeds and actions will determine your destiny and the destiny of this precious planet.

On behalf of the present and past generations I want to apologise to you for leaving you a world which is in turmoil, and crisis, a world where the generations before you only thought of themselves (or thought they were doing you a favour by pursuing reckless industrialisation and materialism). Global hunger, population growth, poverty, rising debts, wars and instability within nations – these are all issues we have to deal with in the 21st century.

The elders in the Muslim community took a long time to wake up; and many are still sleeping. I apologise to you for this and for the fact that we are leaving such a huge burden on your shoulder – the burden of climate change. Climate change has been identified as the greatest challenge of all time as well as increasingly becoming one of the ‘world’s greatest injustices’

What I don’t want you to do is think you can turn your back on any of these issues and that they will be resolved by someone else. If everyone thought like that it would be disastrous for humanity. ‘It is Allah who created the heavens and earth, who has sent down water from the sky and with it brought forth produce to nourish you; He has made ships useful to you, sailing the sea by His command, and the rivers too; He has made the sun and the moon useful to you.’ Qur’an 14: 32-33

Islam teaches us to respect Allah’s creation and maintain the balance He created. Allah commands ‘Do not cause corruption on the earth’ handing us the obligation to practice ‘stewardship’ over nature.

You may be one person, you may think you are
insignificant, and you’re probably thinking as a young person, who would even listen to you? But trust me you are the key! You are the future and the hope for humanity.

You have a double responsibility as Muslim youth, because you need to perform your Islamic duties and show the world that as Muslims you are making a valuable contribution to our precious planet. You want it to be a more beautiful, peaceful, and just planet. You need to let the world see how beautiful our actions as Muslims can be; that we are not all terrorists and radicals, we are ordinary decent citizens who want to live in peace within our Deen. Always remember that Islam is the religion of peace – let us show the world through our actions and deeds that peace is what we want for all citizens of the world.

Let us work with other faith communities to bring about positive change in our society and internationally. Every one of the world’s great traditions contains a core moral and ethical underpinning that life should be just and fair. Let us pursue justice and fairness, let us pursue poverty alleviation, let us pursue clean drinking water for all - by campaigning together, through advocacy, through social media and through global and regional causes!

The Jordan River

Today I want to talk to you about getting involved in a regional cause which is quite unique - I would like to talk about the Jordan River. For decades now, conflict and human arrogance have been responsible for the demise of the Jordan River. Cooperation in search of peace and sustainability is the only hope to restore it to health.

I will speak first of all about the importance of water in Islam and particularly the significance of the Jordan River; and then focus on the actions that you as young Muslims can undertake to assist the EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME) to push for the rehabilitation of the Jordan River and thereby work towards peace in the region.

Water and Islam

The word for water, Ma’a appears more than 60 times throughout the Quran, as well as other words related to water such as rivers, sea, fountains, springs, rain, hail, clouds and winds. The theme of water in the Quran is explored both symbolically and at a practical level. ‘In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, and the ships that run in the sea with that which benefits mankind, and the water that Allah sends down from the sky, then gives life with it to the earth after its death and spreads in it all (kinds of) animals, and the changing of the winds and the clouds made subservient between heaven and earth, there are surely signs for a people who understand.’ Quran 21:107

Water is an integral part of Islam and has been embedded in Islamic beliefs and customs. The term Shariah (Islamic laws) could either mean “the watering source” or “the path that leads to a source of water”. Thus it is a metaphor for divine law quenching the thirst of knowledge or a path leading to the source of truth.
As Muslims, it is important to acknowledge water as one of the immense mercies Allah (swt) has bestowed upon us. This gift is the proof of the existence and uniqueness of Allah as stated in the Surah of the Ant: ‘Or, Who has created the heavens and the earth, and Who sends you down water from the sky? Yea, with it We cause to grow well-planted orchards full of beauty of delight: it is not in your power to cause the growth of the trees in them. Can there be another god besides Allah?’ Quran 27:60

In Surah Al- Furqan, Allah (swt) describes His Mercy: ‘And it is He who sends the winds as good tidings before his Mercy, and We send down from the sky pure water’ Quran 25:48

In addition another Surah states “And have you seen the water that you drink? Is it you who brought it down from the clouds, or is it We who bring it down? If We willed, We could make it bitter, so why are you not grateful?” (Quran 56: 58-70) Water is also a symbol of resurrection since paradise is always described as a place with rivers flowing and florid vegetation (Surah Nahl 16: 30-31). The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) describes water as one of the three wonders of the natural world that every Muslim is entitled to: “Muslims have common share in three [things]. Grass, water and fire” (Abu Dawud – Book 23, 3470).

Another aspect associated to water in the Quran is its purifying power. Several verses focus on the subject of purification and personal cleanliness.

We, as Allah’s stewards on earth, have the responsibility of preserving the natural order of earth and maintaining its balance and must strive to ensure the fair allocation of resources. ‘And we send water from the sky in fixed measure.’ Quran 40:18

‘Tell them that water is shared, everyone in a certain time.’ Quran 54:28

Islam lays down clear instructions on water distribution and condemns wastefulness and prohibits people from defecating or urinating in the proximity of water sources to avoid pollution and contamination. Some basic Islamic norms relating to water management are:-

- Every human being, not just Muslims, has a right to drink water to quench his thirst to assure his survival.
- Denying water to someone asking for it is condemned by the Prophet [pbuh] as one of the most ignominious acts
- Mankind has a priority in the access to water
- Water belongs to the community and no one is allowed to own it unless they have had to put in their labour and time to access it and distribute it.
- There is also a right of irrigation that permits people to water their crops, but domestic use has precedence over agricultural or industrial use.

Reviving the Jordan: a Challenge for Young Muslims...
Significance of the Jordan in Islam

In the past, 1.3 billion metric cubes of water flowed annually through the Jordan River. Today only polluted water, including sewage, flows through it because 96% of this annual flow has been diverted by the national authorities of Israel, Syria, and Jordan. Competition for the valley’s water has been a source of conflict in the region for the last 50 years.

The land around the Jordan River Valley and the Dead Sea plain is revered by Muslims, Christians and Jews as blessed. The Bible calls it “the Garden of the Lord" (Genesis 13: 10), and the Holy Qur’an says that God blessed the land “for all beings.” Indeed, half of humanity views the land and the river Jordan as the geographic and spiritual heartland of their faith.

The lower Jordan River Valley, the Dead Sea plains, and the surrounding hills and mountains are the home for some of the most momentous events in the history of man’s relationship with Allah.

Jordan is also host to the tombs of many of the Prophet Muhammad’s Companions, who were martyred and buried there. The most important companions of the Prophet (PBUH) buried in Jordan include: Zeid ibn al-Haritha (the Prophet’s adopted son and the only companion mentioned by name in the Qur’an); Ja’far bin Abi Talib (cousin of the Prophet and elder brother of Ali, who was the husband of the Prophet’s daughter Fatima and the father of al-Hassan and al-Hussein); Abu ’Ubaydah ‘Amer Ibn al-Jarrah (one of the ”Blessed Ten” companions promised Paradise); Mu’ath bin Jabal (the Prophet’s governor in Yemen); Shurhabil bin Husna (the Scribe of the Qur’anic Revelation), and Dirar bin al-Azwar (a great general).

Furthermore, the sites of several of the most important battles in Islamic history also took place in Jordan. After two unsuccessful attacks against the Byzantine garrison town of Mu’tah in 629 CE, the Muslim Arab tribes regrouped for a much wider military operation. After battles at Yarmouk (634 CE) and Fahl (635 CE), the Muslim armies won a decisive battle against the Byzantines at the second Battle of Yarmouk (636 CE). This victory opened the way to the conquest of Syria and the rapid expansion of the Islamic world.

The river Jordan flows into the Dead Sea and the Quran mentions in Surah Rum that battle that took place between the Persians and the Romans at the lowest part of the earth, i.e. the Dead Sea. [Quran 30: 2,3,4]

Current condition of the Jordan River

Since the demise of the Ottoman Empire the water resources of the Jordan River have not been fairly allocated; and the situation has worsened because of the consistent diversion of water by the three main riparian countries.

The degradation of the Jordan River in terms of quantity and quality is due to the growing demand for water by Israel, Syria, Palestine, and Jordan, and is compounded by the adverse effects of climate change. Untreated or poorly treated sewage water has been dumped directly or allowed to leak into the river for the past 50 years.
Residents and tourists have little access to the river, due to military restrictions. Palestinians have no access to the river due to its control by Israel and do not receive water directly from the river.

Unless immediate action is taken, the Jordan River is in danger of drying up completely. (See the ‘Save the Jordan’ website and the report ‘A River of Life’ for FoEME’s recommendations on what needs to be done to revive the river).

**An opportunity to get involved**

Finally, I would like to reiterate the importance of your role as young Muslims in preserving the natural environment as, on the Day of Judgement, we will all be held accountable for our time on this precious planet.

The Jordan River is an important global icon that is part of the shared natural and cultural heritage of many people around the world. Whether or not we live in the region we all have a role to play in restoring this renowned river to an ecological state that is healthy enough to sustain the valley.

EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East is giving you an opportunity to take practical action for both the environment and to build peace in the Middle East. See the campaign website – www.SaveTheJordan.com - for details on how you and your community can support this campaign. You will also find the Save the Jordan campaign on Facebook and Twitter – hashtag #SaveTheJordan.

Thank you and good luck with your efforts.
The Islamic worldview holds that God chose special places to be blessed and holy, including the "Holy Land" (Qur’an, 5:21) which is also described in the Qur’an as the "land that We have blessed for the nations" (Qur’an, 21:71). An important verse that addresses the extent of this holiness is that which covers the Night Journey, in which God took Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) from Mecca to Jerusalem: Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al- Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing. (Qur’an, 17:1)

It is important to emphasize two things in this verse; the first is that the blessedness is extended to the surroundings and precincts of Jerusalem, and the second is that the Holy Land is not to be equated with the geopolitical maps that emerged (still emerging!) vis-à-vis historical Palestine. Would holiness, for example, stop at the Lebanese borders? The same principle applies to Jordan; would holiness stop at the Jordan River? And if it does, does it stop at its western bank, or at the eastern bank of the river? Such an introduction is important to establish that the Jordan River is part of the blessed land in which it runs.

The Jordan River is vital for all inhabitants in the region. It should be protected against excessive use. It is already reduced to a negligent fraction of what it was before the Israeli Occupation in 1967, especially after the establishment of settlements in the Jordan Valley. While the primary responsibility for protecting this river is that of governments, individuals are also invited to participate in the preservation of this river.

It is the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) to conserve water, even if one is right next to river. ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Amr reported that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) “passed by Sa’d [Ibn Abi Waqqas] while he was performing ablution and said to him: Why the excessive use of water? [Sa’d] asked: Even in ablution there is excessive use of water? [The Prophet] replied: Yes, even if you were at a flowing river. (Narrated by Ibn Majah).

Reports about waste water polluting the Jordan River is also disheartening. One should remember that the Prophet (Peace be upon him) prohibited urinating in water collections (Narrated by Al-Nasa’i).

All the natural resources in this world are trusts, and it is the religious duty of Muslims to take care of these sources and use them in a sustainable manner. The Jordan River is included.

Prof. Mustafa Abu Sway

Mustafa Abu Sway is the Integral Chair for the Study of Imam Ghazali’s Work at Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and at Al-Quds University. He has been Professor of Philosophy and Islamic Studies at Al-Quds University in Jerusalem since 1996.
**On water, rain, and life...**

Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the earth were a joined entity, and We separated them and made from water every living thing? Then will they not believe? *Quran, 21:30*

And Allah has sent down rain from the sky and given life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness. Indeed in that is a sign for a people who listen. *Quran, 16:65*

And We have sent down blessed rain from the sky and made grow thereby gardens and grain from the harvest. *Quran, 50:9*

It is Allah who created the heavens and the earth and sent down rain from the sky and produced thereby some fruits as provision for you and subjected for you the ships to sail through the sea by His command and subjected for you the rivers. *Quran, 14:32*

And have you seen the water that you drink? Is it you who brought it down from the clouds, or is it We who bring it down? *Quran, 56:68-69*

Say, “Have you considered: if your water was to become sunken [into the earth], then who could bring you flowing water?” *Quran, 67:30*

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**On man’s Vice-Regency (Khilafah) and care for the earth...**

And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, “Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority.” They said, “Will you place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?” Allah said, “Indeed, I know that which you do not know.” *Quran, 2:30*

And the servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth easily. *Quran, 25:63*
Abdullah Ibn 'Amr reported that Prophet Muhammad [PBUH] “passed by Sa`d [Ibn Abi Waqqas] while he was performing ablution and said to him: Why the excessive use of water? [Sa`d] asked: Even in ablution there is excessive use of water? [The Prophet] replied: Yes, even if you were at a flowing river.”
Narrate by Ibn Majah (Chapter 2, p.221)

There is reward in [caring for] every living being
Sahih Muslim (Chapter 7, p.44)

Verily, this world is sweet and appealing, and Allah placed you as vicegerents therein; He will see what you will do.
Sahih Muslim, Musnad Ahmad Bin Hanbal
(Chapter 3, page 22)

It has been narrated on the authority of Hadhrat Abdullah bin `Umar (May Allah be well pleased with both of them), that the Holy Prophet [SAAS] passed by a person performing wudu. He [SAAS] said: Do not waste [water], do not use more water than you need it.
Sunan Ibn Majah
The Jordan River runs through one of the historic and spiritual heartlands of Islam. The territory around the Holy City of Jerusalem / Al Quds, including the land beyond the Jordan River and even as far as Damascus, has traditionally been understood in Islam as belonging to "the land which We had blessed" (Quran 21:71).

The Jordan Valley also played a crucial role in the expansion of Islam under Caliph Umar, and formed part of the cultural core of the Muslim world during the first great flowering of Islamic culture. It was here, close to the East bank of the Jordan, that the Muslim armies, including many who had known the Prophet (SAAS), fought one of the decisive battles against the Byzantine forces at Fahl (Pella) in 635 CE.

Some of the closest Companions of the Prophet Mohammed (SAAS), veterans of this campaign, are buried on the Jordanian side of the river. They include –

- **Zayd ibn Al-Harithah**, the adopted son of the Prophet (SAAS).
- **Ja’far ibn Abî Tâlib**, the cousin of the Prophet (SAAS).
- **Abu ‘Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah**, one of the first to accept Islam and later supreme commander of the Arab armies under Caliph Umar. Abu ‘Ubaydah is buried in the Jordan Valley.
- **Bilal bin Rabah**, who served as mu’athin to the Prophet (SAAS).
- **Dirar bin Al-Azwar**, an early Companion and renowned warrior, buried in the Jordan Valley.
- **Sharhabil Bin Hassneh**, among the most trusted of the Prophet’s (SAAS) Companions and, according to some, one of the scribes of the Holy Quran. Buried in the Jordan Valley.
- **Amir bin Abi Waqqas**, said to be the eleventh Companion to convert to Islam, also buried in the Jordan Valley.
- **Mu’ath bin Jabal**, a Companion who fought in the battle of Badr and who is also said to be among the four compilers of the Quran during the time of the Prophet Mohammed (SAAS). Mu’ath, too, is buried in the Jordan Valley.

On the West bank of the river, too, there are sites sacred to Islam, most notably the maqam or shrine of Nabi Musa (pbuh). Believed by many Muslims to be the burial place of the Prophet Musa (pbuh), this site flourished as a focus of popular devotion and ziyara (‘visitation’ or ‘pilgrimage’) from the Ayyubid period until the middle of the twentieth century.

The Jordan River Valley is important not just in the religious history of Islam, but also in the development of a distinctive Islamic culture and civilization. This can be seen at Hisham’s Palace in Jericho – a winter retreat built in the 8th century by the Umayyad Caliphs of Damascus. The palace contained gardens, mosques, bathhouses, and libraries. It still preserves one of the finest Islamic mosaics anywhere in the world.
All the natural resources in this world are trusts, and it is the religious duty of Muslims to take care of these sources and use them in a sustainable manner. The Jordan River is included.

Prof. Mustafa Abu Sway, Al Aqsa Mosque & Al Quds University,

We are God’s stewards and agents on Earth. We are not masters of this Earth; it does not belong to us to do what we wish. It belongs to God and He has entrusted us with its safekeeping.

Dr. Abdullah Omar Nasseef, Secretary General, Muslim World League, Muslim declaration on Nature, Assisi, 1976

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.” As Caponera points out, it seems 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.” Not only does water give life, but every life is itself made of water: “We made from water every living thing.”

Naser I. Faruqui, Director of Science & Innovation, International Development Research Center
The essence of Islamic teaching is that the entire universe is Allah’s creation. Allah makes the waters flow upon the earth, upholds the heavens, makes the rain fall and keeps the boundaries between day and night. The whole of the rich and wonderful universe belongs to Allah, its Maker. It is Allah who created the plants and the animals in their pairs and gave them the means to multiply. Then Allah created mankind - a very special creation because mankind alone was created with reason and the power to think and even the means to turn against his Creator. Mankind has the potential to acquire a status higher than that of the angels or sink lower than the lowest of the beasts.

The word ‘Islam’ has the dual meaning of submission and peace. Mankind is special, a very particular creation of Allah. But still we are Allah’s creation and we can only properly understand ourselves when we recognise that our proper condition is one of submission to Allah who made us.

And only when we submit to the Will of Allah can we find peace: peace within us as individuals, peace between man and man, and peace between man and nature. When we submit to the Will of Allah, we become aware of the sublime fact that all our powers, potentials, skills and knowledge are granted to us by Allah. We are His servants and when we are conscious of that, when we realise that all our achievements derive from the Mercy of Allah, and when we return proper thanks and respect and worship to Allah for our nature and creation, then we become free. Our freedom is that of being sensible, aware, responsible trustees of Allah’s gifts and bounty.

For the Muslim, mankind’s role on earth is that of a Khalifah - vicegerent or trustee of Allah. We are Allah’s stewards and agents on Earth. We are not masters of this Earth; it does not belong to us to do what we wish. It belongs to Allah and He has entrusted us with its safekeeping. Our function as vicegerents, Khalifahs of Allah, is only to oversee the trust. The Khalifah is answerable for his/her actions, for the way in which he/she uses or abuses the trust of Allah.

Islam teaches us that we have been created by Allah, that we will return to Allah for Judgement, and that we are accountable for our deeds as well as our omissions. The Khalifah will have to render an account of how he treated the trust of Allah on the Day of Reckoning. The notion that describes the accountability of the
khalifah is akhirah (the Hereafter). Islam is the guidance of how to live today so that we can face the akhirah: it is the Message which informs us of what will be involved in that reckoning. 

The central concept of Islam is Tawhid - the Unity of Allah. Allah is Unity and His Unity is also reflected in the unity of mankind, and the unity of man and nature. His trustees are responsible for maintaining the unity of His creation, the integrity of the Earth, its flora and fauna, its wildlife and natural environment. Unity cannot be had by discord, by setting one need against another; it is maintained by balance and harmony. Therefore, Muslims say that Islam is the middle path and we will be answerable for how we have walked this path and how we have maintained balance and harmony in the whole of creation around us.

And these are not remote, other-worldly notions, they concern us here and now. If you were to ask me what the notion of the Hereafter has to do with here and now, my answer might surprise you. I would say nuclear power and biotechnology. Both of these are very present here-and-now issues. Both have benefits and costs. Both have implications for the health and well being of mankind and nature. If I sincerely intend to be Allah’s khalifah, His steward on Earth, then I must have an opinion about them and prepare myself to make choices about them, because I will be accountable for what mankind has wrought with these devices in the Hereafter.

Islam is a very practical world view. It seeks, in all its principles and injunctions, to give pragmatic shapes to its concepts and values. Indeed, the notion of tawhid and khilafah have been translated into practical injunctions in the Shari’ah (Islamic Law). Surah Shari’ah institutions as haram zones, inviolate areas within which development is prohibited to protect natural resources, and hima, reserves established solely for the conservation of wildlife and forests, form the core of the environmental legislation of Islam.

The classical Muslim jurist, Izz Al-Din Ibn Abd Al-Salam, used these aspects of the Shari’ah when he formulated the bill of legal rights of animals in the thirteenth century. Similarly, numerous other jurists and scholars developed legislations to safeguard water resources, prevent over-grazing, conserve forests, limit the growth of cities, protect cultural property, and so on. Islam’s environmental ethics then are not...
limited to metaphysical notions; they provide a practical guide as well.

Muslims need to turn to this nexus of values, this way of understanding themselves and their environment. The notions of unity, trusteeship and accountability should not be reduced to matters of personal piety; they must guide all aspects of their life and work. Shari’ah should not be relegated just to issues of crime and punishment, it must also become the vanguard for environmental legislation.

We often say that Islam is a complete way of life, by which it is meant that our ethical system provides the bearings for all our actions. Yet our actions often undermine the very values we cherish. Often while working as scientists or technologists, economists or politicians, we act contrary to the environmental dictates of Islam. We must imbibe these values into our very being. We must judge our actions by them. They furnish us with a world-view which enables us to ask environmentally appropriate questions, to draw up the right balance sheet of possibilities, and to properly weigh the environmental costs and benefits of what we want, what we can do within the ethical boundaries established by Allah, without violating the rights of His other creations.

If we use the same values, the same understanding in our work as scientist or technologist, economist or politician, as we do to know ourselves as Muslims - those who submit themselves to the Will of Allah - then, I believe, we will create a caring and practical way of being, doing and knowing; a true Islamic alternative to the environmentally destructive thought and actions which dominates the world today.
Article 1: Honour bestowed on man

Man is the lieutenant of Allah on earth. He is mandated to build civilization and held responsible for the harnessing and protection of environment. The Muslim, in particular, is duty-bound to take care of the environment, in the general acceptance of the term, and to make every personal and possible effort to achieve sustainable development for the general well-being of each and everybody.

Article 2: Responsibility of man

Indeed, the most beloved by Allah are the pious and the charitable, and the most hated by Allah are the one who wreak havoc in earth. Charity is every good deed that benefits to people and takes care of the environment in which they live. It may be an act of social solidarity, a contribution to the restoration of peace and security or the eradication of poverty and unemployment, in a bid to achieve justice and equity through collective participation in the development enterprise, motivated by religious, cultural and humanitarian drives.

Article 3: Environment from an Islamic perspective

The environment is a gift donated to man by Allah. Therefore, individuals and communities are, all, duty-bound to take care of it and promote all its natural resources, including air, climate, water, seas, flora and fauna, and refrain from any act likely to cause pollution or damage the eco-system or disturb the balance thereto.
Water as a social good

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.” As Caponera (this volume) points out, it seems 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.” Not only does water give life, but every life is itself made of water: “We made from water every living thing.”

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 (pbuh) to the cleansing action of water in the following hadith, “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.”

Water and equity

Muslims believe that ensuring social justice, or equity, in society is the cornerstone of Islam, and that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) set the example for them in this regard. Virtually all of the hadith relate to the preservation of equity, and those related to water are no exception. For example, “None of you will have faith till he wishes for his (Muslim) brother what he likes for himself.” Obviously, this applies to the desire for an adequate amount of clean, fresh water, as well as anything else. A Muslim cannot hoard excess water – rather he is obliged to allow others to benefit by it. The Prophet (pbuh) stated that among the three people Allah will ignore on the day of resurrection are “a man [who] possessed superfluous water on a way and he withheld it from the travellers.” The Quran warns human beings against unfair distribution by stating that the riches of this
world belong to Allah, his Prophet, orphans, the needy, and the wayfarer, and that these riches ought "not (merely) make a circuit between the wealthy among you." In fact, the recognition of water as a vital resource, of which everyone has the right to a fair share, is emphasized by the following hadith, which effectively makes water a community resource to which all, rich or poor, have a right: "Muslims have common share in three things: grass (pasture), water and fire (fuel)." On the Prophet’s advice, one of his companions, Othman, who later became the third Muslim caliph, bought the well of Ruma (a settlement in Arabia) and made its water available free to the Muslim community – the well was actually made into a waqf, a usufruct or a collective property for religious purposes and public utility.

[...]

Water conservation

The Quran makes two clear statements regarding water that support water demand management. First, the supply of water is fixed, and second, it should not be wasted. The statement that water supply is fixed, and that therefore, at some point, demand must be managed because supplies cannot be infinitely increased is: "And we send down water from the sky in fixed measure." The Quran then tells humans that they may use God’s gifts for their sustenance in moderation, provided that they commit no excess therein: "O Children of Adam! . . . Eat and drink: But waste not by excess, for God loveth not the wasters."

The hadith are even more explicit. The Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) "used to perform ablution with one mudd of water [equal to 2/3 litre] and used to take a bath with one sa’ up to five mudds [equal to 2-3 1/2 litres]." This hadith demonstrates the logical approach to sustainable water use in arid Arabia where the Prophet lived. However, the Prophet forbade waste even in conditions of seeming plenty when he said "Do not waste water even if performing ablution on the bank of a fast-flowing (large) river." Given the clarity of these examples, it is surprising that they are not used more widely to promote water conservation in predominantly Muslim countries. As noted by Atallah (this volume), ordinary Muslims support the idea of being educated about the environment by their religious leaders. In a 1993 survey in Jordan, 64 per cent of the respondents believed that the imams should play an important role in environmental education and public awareness, but only 34 per cent felt that imams were already doing so.
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