

## **Foundation:**

# **Toward Wise Interaction between Environmental Scientists and Islam**

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**Abstract:** Environmental issues are getting increasingly more complex now. As such providing technological solution alone in addressing environmental problems deems to fail without strong consideration on the human dimension. It's necessary to understand and accommodate local culture or value in getting the public involvement in environmental and development agenda. Islam as a way of life is indeed unique and has huge potential as alternative to the conventional approach of handling environmental problems especially in the countries with Muslim majority. In performing their religious duties which include managing the environment, Muslims are guided by three principles, namely *Tauheed*, *Khaleefa* and *Amanaa*. It is vital for Muslim scientists to comprehend that the purpose of carrying out their duty is beyond the worldly rewards but to glorify Allah and achieve the true success (*Al Falah*). The concept of *Khaleefa* requires man to deliver his duty in conserving the environment at their best as he will be judged in the hereafter. Man is only as trustee of Allah on this earth and he owns nothing. Though human beings have the right to use other created beings, they must manage the nature and resources wisely.

Keywords: *Al falah*, *Amanaa*, *A way of life*, *Khaleefa*, *Tauheed*

## **1. Introduction**

Today, Muslims constitute about 20% of the world population. As Islam is the fastest growing religion, Muslims are projected to exceed a quarter of the world population by year 2030. Many Muslim countries are yet to be developed. However, it is sad to see the environmental conditions in many Muslim countries are deteriorating at an alarming rate. Major environmental issues in Muslim worlds include water pollution, poor solid waste management, inadequate sanitation, deforestation, air pollution, toxic and radioactive waste, soil erosion, desertification, extinction of flora and fauna species, global warming, and exorbitant use of energy. If this destructive is not controlled effectively, the next generations will have no livable earth to inherit. More often than not, destruction of environment is link to socio-economic and political injustice which will affect the larger communities. In any case, the poor and marginalized will have to suffer the most.

On the brighter side, the potential for Muslim countries to grow is tremendous. Indeed many Muslim countries are rich with natural resources and have huge population to boost and support economic activities, locally and regionally. Islamic nations must strive for economic expansion in order to survive and meeting the needs of their increasing population. It is crucial to see this potential in the future as events in the Muslim world can have far reaching impact on the local and global environments. In the development process, Muslim countries must not repeat mistakes during the industrialization era in Europe, Japan and north America to avoid unnecessary environmental disasters. This requires formulation of a more sustainable system or development model.

Solving various environmental problems requires both technological solution and human dimension. Environmental crisis will not stop until the environment is given back its sacredness in the eyes of the abuser. Such a deed is only possible through humanity's making peace with its surroundings, inner peace and most importantly God (Murad 2011). In this regard Islamic principles may offer a unique development model. Islam offers more than a belief system; it is a way of life that comes with well-defined set of values and specific guidance in various aspects of life. Indeed the glory of Islamic civilization in the past was driven by full adherence to Islamic principles which are deeply rooted in the Muslim culture, administration and management of nature and the environment.

## **2. The Islamic Perspective on Environment:**

In Islam, everything in the universe is created by God, the Almighty. However, Allah has chosen man as His best creation. Man has been endowed with a free choice, an intellect and a conscience. Islam provides man with spiritual and moral values to distinguish him from other created beings.

Verily, We created man in the best of form (Qur'an 95:4).

The main purpose that Allah created human beings on this world is to worship Him alone and to be grateful to Him. Muslim must strive to achieve the true success in the present world and in the hereafter. In doing so, the highest aim is to glorify Allah and to get His blessing and not for worldly rewards (Fig. 1).

Although Allah creations are meant to serve human being, man must learn to share this universe with other created beings and must appreciate and respect their existence. All living and non living creations are interrelated, inter

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dependent and part and parcel of the whole life of the universe. Perturbing one species will affect the other creations and disturbs the ecosystem balance. It implies that every creature should be protected. It is important to comprehend that even non-human creation is continuously praising Allah. As signs of Allah greatness, they manifest Allah the Creator and Sustainer and as being in the state of ‘muslim’, they perfectly obey and submit to Allah ordain. By assisting human beings in their spiritual journey, they become part of a sacred activity. Also by regarding non-human beings as ummah, Allah is equally concerned about their providence and life as of human community. Thus non-human creation is having its own value that need to be respected. As such, in Islam an anthropocentric or human-centred view of creation is not acceptable. Indeed, each creation whether living being or non living has its own role to play in the overall plan of Allah’s creation.

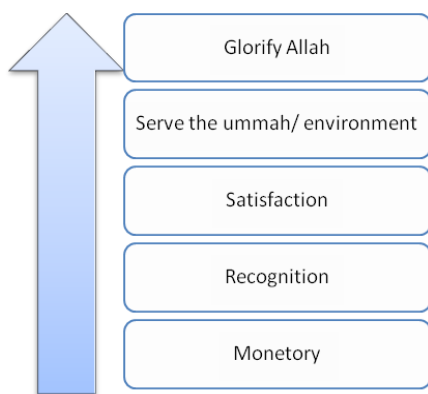


Fig. 1. Purpose of work or life.

The holistic approach in dealing with environmental issues was long promoted by the Prophet Muhammad *sall Allaahu 'alay-hi wa- sallam* (May Allah pray on him and grant him peace). It emphasizes on the fundamental interdependency amongst all created beings and the environment. In other words, If one were to abuse the environment, the consequence will be felt by others.

The Holy Qur’an is full of exhalation of nature, its beauty and the need to protect it. Nature is portrayed as God’s glory, a gift of sustenance and humanity is divinely ordained responsibilities to care for the natural world and keep the harmony and balance placed within it. In the Qur’an there are ample instructions as well as warnings to the faithful not to abuse their power in dealing with the environment.

The concept of Tawhid or Divine unity is vital and fundamental in Islam. Divine unity is apparent in the unity of humanity and of nature. For Muslims to perform their religious duties, which include managing the environmental, they are guided by three basic principles:

- Tawhid* (unity)
- Khaleefa* (stewardship)
- Amanah* (trust)

## 2.1. Tawhid

The doctrine of *Tawhid*, the belief in the oneness of God, is a fundamental principal in the Qur’an. *Tawhid* affirms and acknowledges that God is one and the only Reality. Then creation is part of the Essence of God and it manifests Him. This affirms the wholeness and holiness of the creation and thus it brings value to creation. It is vital for Muslim scientists to comprehend that the purpose of carrying out their duty is beyond the worldly rewards or mere satisfaction or recognition by peers but to glorify Allah.

The natural environment which includes the heavens with its spaciousness, billions of stars, galaxies and planets, the earth with its mountains, seas, plants, trees, deserts, fruits, animals and metals has been created by Allah to be observed so that man can learn the greatness of Allah by reflecting on nature. Muslims understand that Allah has not created all this for nothing. This is mentioned many times in the holy Qur’an;

“Verily, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day, there are surely signs for men of understanding” (al-Imran 190).

“Have you not seen that God is glorified by all in the heavens and on the earth – such as the birds with wings outspread? Each know its worship its worship and glorification, and God is aware of what they do” (an-Nur 41).

“Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the night and the day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which God sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds subjugated between the sky and earth - [here] indeed are signs for a people who thinks” (al-Baqarah 164).

The large number of Quranic verses that ask Man to contemplate the greatness of Allah creations compel Muslim scholars to regard nature and the universe as a “book” or “book of the universe” (Ozdemir 2012). Just like the Qur’an, the book of the universe shows us clear signs of Allah’s supremacy, our Sustainer and Creator. Unlike the secular approach in understanding the universe which is purely based on physical entity and devoid of any spiritual value or Ruh, Islam places sacred and spiritual dimension to understand and explore nature and the environment.

## 2.2. Khaleefa

Muslims are always reminded on their role as vicegerent or trustee of Allah on this earth. We are only as Allah’s stewards and agents and do not own anything on this Earth. Everything belongs to Allah and He has entrusted us with its safekeeping. Our function as vicegerents of Allah is only to oversee the trust. Man is answerable for his actions, for the way in which he uses or abuses the trust of Allah.

It is a religious duty to carefully preserve or manage the environment by not over using or wasting resources. Man

must also understand the delicate balance of the nature and environment and must not transgress this balance. The Qur'an draws our attention to the balance of nature, then indicates that we should be careful to observe the balances and rights in the life of society. That is to say, rights and balances are universal rules that we have to observe. Allah had created the world with a particular order, balance, and harmony.

"And the earth We have spread out; set thereon mountains firm and immovable; and produced therein all kinds of things in due balance." (Al Hijr 19)

'And the Firmament has He raised high, and He has set up the Balance (of justice), in order that you may not transgress (due) balance. So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance" (Al Rahman 7-9).

In the present context, the above verse can be related to global warming, caused by accelerated release of green house gases (GHG) to the atmosphere and trapping heat from the earth surface. At its natural level, GHG is vital to keep the earth temperature just right, not too hot and not too cold. This balance needs to be understood and Man must seek knowledge to deal with this challenging issue. Therefore in performing this amanah as vicegerent, not only a Man needs to perform his duty religiously but he must also know how to deliver the trust. As such seeking knowledge or science and technology in the related field to prudently perform the trust becomes obligatory for Fardhu Kifayah for the Muslim ummah or scholars.

Allah has created the world with a particular order, balance, and harmony. Man must not destroy this balance through over exploitation of resources, wasteful and greedy. In fact it is crucial for Man to know the threshold or limit that should not be exceeded when using the resources so that the ecosystem can recover naturally. Again this needs science and probably modelling. This is consistent with the concept of sustainability. Allah reminded human beings not to inflict damage or corrupt the earth.

"Corruption appears on land and sea because of (the evil) that men's hands have done, so that He may make them taste a part of what they have done, in order that they may return." (Al Rum 41)

The fragility of water as the most important resource for life is mentioned by Allah, and He reminded that human action through over exploitation of land for example can cause depletion or disappearance of water.

"And we send down water from the sky according to (due) measure, and we cause it to soak in the soil; and We certainly able to drain it off (with ease)" (Al Mu'minuun 18)

It is amazing that for a given area on this earth, the annual rainfall has been the same for so long. Similar amount of water is evaporated, a due proportion falls on earth and the

rest on oceans, but the distribution is almost similar every year. The hydrological cycle provides clean water to the earth and amazingly, the proportion of fresh water of 0.08% of the total water budget on earth is maintained. However, this balance is delicate and might change due to global warming that modifies the global wind circulation. It's vital to note that a slight change in the global water balance could significantly modify the freshwater availability and greatly affect the environment.

### 2.3. *Amaana*

In Islam, man is responsible to his action and will be accountable to God on what is trusted to him. The ultimate responsibility to protect and conserve the environment lies with the individual who will be judged on the Day of Judgement for what he has done regardless of any constraint or limitation in delivering his task. It is not the question of whether he succeeded in delivering the task or not but what he has done. Prophet Muhammad *sall Allaahu 'alay-hi wa-sallam* (May Allah pray on him and grant him peace) said,

"Everyone of you is a guardian and is responsible for his charges. The ruler who has authority over people is a guardian and is responsible for them" (Sahih Bukhari 3.46.730).

In the same manner man is also responsible and to be kind to nature and not to abuse the trust that has been placed on the shoulders of man. In fact, to be kind to animals is an integral part of Islam for Muslims. All human beings, flora and fauna enjoy the right to share in the resources of the earth and man's abuses of any resource are forbidden. Indeed animal is also part of ummah as mentioned in the Qur'an.

"There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth, or a being that flies on its wings, but (form part of) communities like you Nothing have we omitted from the Book, and they (all) shall be gathered to their Lord in the end." (Al An-Aam 38)

### 3. Conclusion

Managing the environment from Islamic perspective could provide a strong boost for Muslim to champion various environmental issues. There are numerous verses in the Qur'an and Hadith that ask human being to protect and conserve the nature and the environment. Many of the modern concepts of environmental management had been pioneered by Muslims during the era of Islamic civilization since 1400 yers ago. Muslims nowadays need to relook at this very precious knowledge as basis for stronger sustainable management agenda.

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