

Environmental Sustainability: What Islam Propagates

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Abstract: Through the teaching of Islam, the earth is mentioned more than four hundred times in the Qur'an, whereas the sky and beyond are mentioned only about three hundred times. This article intends to explore and share that Islam does understand the earth to be subservient to humankind. Therefore, the earth should not be administered and exploited irresponsibly. Based on the teachings and principles of Islam, one leads to a strong sense of goodness and purity of the earth. In Islam, human and environment interaction is guided by the notion of the person as a vicegerent or steward of the earth. The extensive evidence provided by the Holy Quran is indicative that the earth is an important protected element for future sustenance of the next generation and is to be a safe place to keep. Despite that, the concept of sustainable development on the earth is complex and murky. It lends itself to several interpretations and it is still in the process of evolution. However, an evaluation of different approaches to the concept leads to the same goal. The underlying issue behind the various interpretations is eventually the concern on how the environmental perimeter is sustained. The rapid deterioration of human environment is nothing but a crisis of values. Muslims and mankind at large are being instructed to look after the environment and not to damage it. Therefore, an Islamic way of a sustainable environmental life entails living in "peace and harmony (*salam*)" at individual, social as well as ecological levels. All human activities have some impact on the environment. And for that this paper will display the reconciliation of Islam and environmental sustainability through the perennial reference of the Holy Quran and the Words of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

Key words: Environmental sustainability • Islam • Individual • Social • Ecological

INTRODUCTION

A characteristic of the modern industrialized world is that it places total separation between science and religion. This is quite foreign to the Islamic tradition. Much of the damage done to the environment and to the rights of future generations is due to the misuse of science and scientific power. The recent gradual awareness of the degradation of global environment has rendered Man to be certain of the present state of ecological imbalance indicative of the spiritual rootlessness of modern culture. Man's environmental predicament has resulted based on the deal that development only relates solely between Man to Man. This has rooted the environmental attitude which has brought modern civilization to the brink of disaster. Subsequently, it is quite evident that the depletion of natural resources and the deterioration of human environment has let out the genie of technological change and is now unable to control the unruly spirit.

Scientific progress is encouraged in Islam but held within the matrix of religious values. From the perspective of Islam, science is not free to pursue the course of environmental degradation and damage to the human condition the way it has in many parts of the world. It is interesting to recall that the release of science from the absolute constraints imposed on it by religion was attributable in significant measure of Islamic philosophical thought. At a time when free scientific inquiry was stifled in the west as leading to contradictions with religious teaching, Islamic philosophers like Averroes in Spain helped to establish the doctrine of double truth – there is truth which comes from divine revelation as well as there is truth which comes from human research (Salloum, 2001).

"Allah is he who raised The Heavens without any pillars that ye can see... He has subjected the sun and the moon! Each one runs (its course) for a term appointed. He doth regulate all affairs, explaining the Signs in detail... 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, two and two: He draweth the Night as a veil O'er the day. Behold, verily in these things there are signs for those who consider" (Qur'an 13: 2-4).

These lines display the earthly elements and to live, Muslims should therefore seek to protect and preserve their environment. Moreover by so doing, they protect God's creatures that are not merely objects but are believed to have a spirit and purpose of their own. They are in fact believed to pray to God and praise Him. Humankind might not be able to understand how these creatures praise God but this does not mean that they do not do so:

"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!" (Qur'an 17:4).

The Islamic attitude of duty towards the environment does not merely derive from the fact that God is its creator. There are other reasons as well. One is that humans act as the agents of God on earth. This agency is not blind and mechanical but is creative in its own way and moreover it must be fulfilled by operating according to God's instructions. Another reason why, in Islam, humans are expected to protect the environment is that no other creature is able to perform this task. Humans are the only beings that God has "entrusted" with the responsibility of looking after the earth. This trusteeship is seen by Islam to be so onerous and burdensome that no other creature could accept it. By this act of acceptance, humans accepted responsibility for the custody of the environment. This is well supported by a book authored by Bob Doppelt entitled "*The Power of Sustainable Thinking*" where the focus of this book tells us how to create a positive future for the climate, the Planet, our organization and life.

Islam expects the believer to respect the benefit derived from the blessings of Allah made available in the form of natural resources. Islam is likewise adamant that resources should be utilized only to the extent of necessities and a luxurious life with extravagance should be avoided. The Qur'anic ruling, consume from the eatables and healthy drinks but do not indulge in excess is the key to a healthy individual and society. A creation which is so valuable and designed with such a high purpose must be respected, and wastefulness in its use is not a sign of due respect. This is not just or righteous conduct but the very reverse.

"Lo! We offered the trust Unto the heavens and the Earth and the hills, But they shrank from bearing it And were afraid of it And man assumed it" (Qur'an 33: 72).

Prophet Muhammad and Green Environmental Philosophy: The idea of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as a pioneer of environmentalism will initially strike many as strange. Indeed, the term "environment" and related concepts like "ecology", "environmental awareness" and "sustainability", are modern-day inventions. These were the terms coined with the growing concern about the current state of the natural world around us. However, a closer look at the Prophet's life reveals that he was a staunch advocate of environmental protection. One could say he was an "environmentalist avant la lettre", a pioneer in the domain of conservation, sustainable development and resource management. This was one man who constantly sought to maintain a harmonious balance between human and nature. From all accounts of his life and deeds, we read that the Prophet had a profound respect for fauna and flora, as well as an almost visceral connection to the four elements : earth, water, fire and air. He was a strong proponent of the sustainable use and cultivation of land and water, proper treatment of animals, plants and birds, and the equal rights of users. In this context, the modernity of the Prophet's view of the environment and the concepts he introduced to his followers is particularly striking; certain passages of the Hadith could easily be mistaken for discussions about contemporary environmental issues.

The Prophet's environmental philosophy is first of all holistic. This entails a fundamental link and interdependency between all natural elements. His teachings propagate the premise that if man abuses or exhausts one element, the natural world as a whole will suffer the direct consequences. This belief is nowhere formulated in one concise phrase rather than an underlying principle that forms the foundation of all the Prophet's actions and words. The Prophet considered all of God's creations to be equal before God. and he believed not only animals, but also land, forests and watercourses should have rights. Therefore, abusing one of His creations, whether it is a living being or a natural resource, is a sin. The Prophet believed that the universe and the creations in it – animals, plants, water, and land – were not created for mankind.

There are several *Hadiths* of the Prophet stating the importance of protecting the environment and keeping it clean and fruitful. Cleanliness is an important part of Islamic teaching which goes to great lengths in specifying principles of physical cleanliness. This principle of cleanliness applies internally to the mind, physically to

the body and externally to the environment. In order to keep the environment free of pollution and therefore pleasant the Prophet has said "Picking up a bone from the way is a *Sadaqah* (Charity)". He further said "Removing a harmful and dangerous thing from the way is also *Sadaqah*. In addition, Islam requires the environment to be productively used. There are numerous traditions of the Prophet which show his intense concern with these aspects. Here are some: "Whosoever plants a tree, he will be rewarded with as much reward as is relevant to its yields" (Bukhari). On another occasion he said: "whosoever plants a tree, or grow crops, and a man, bird or an animal or a beast of prey eat its fruits, it is a charity for him" (Bukhari). According to another *Hadith*, plantation is so important that even if doomsday starts and a person has a palm seedling or palm shoot in his hands he should plant it (Bukhari) and another saying that states "There is none amongst the believers who plants a tree, or sows a seed, and then a bird, or a person, or an animal eats thereof, but it is regarded as having given a charitable gift [for which there is great recompense]." (Al-Bukhari, III: 51).

The Prophet's attitude towards the sustainable use of land, conservation of water and the treatment of animals is a further illustration of the humility of his environmental philosophy. The Prophet saw earth as subservient to man, but recognized that it should not be overexploited or abused, and that it had rights, just as the trees and wildlife living on it. In order to protect land, forests and wildlife, the Prophet created inviolable zones known as *hima* and *haram*, in which resources were to be left untouched. Both are still in use today: *haram* areas are often drawn up around wells and water sources to protect the groundwater table from over-pumping. *Hima* applies particularly to wildlife and forestry and usually designates an area of land where grazing and woodcutting are restricted, or where certain animal species are protected. The Prophet not only encouraged the sustainable use of fertile lands, he also told his followers of the benefits of making unused land productive: planting a tree, sowing a seed and irrigating dry land were all regarded as charitable deeds. Thus any person who irrigates a plot of "dead", or desert land becomes its rightful owner.

Based on the Prophet's philosophy and his role model, Islamic environmentalism can make a difference in the struggle to protect the Earth. The Islamic concept that humankind is a vicegerent of God and is a trustee of all God's creation places great responsibility on us to walk lightly on earth and avoid over consumption and waste. Malaysia as a whole has quite a good record in developing policy and guidelines to protect and safeguard the biodiversity. Unfortunately, there are so

many weaknesses in its implementation which resulted in serious threats to our environment from shortsighted emphasis on business management and economic growth. For example, the devastating impact of Tsunami in 2004 that hit the island of Penang would not be that severe if our mangrove swamps along the North Corridor Economic Region coastline had not been cleared for tourism and industrial projects. This clearly shows that natural disasters and human activity on earth are closely linked.

Spiritual Responsibility Towards the Environment:

Environmental issues are, in the final analysis steeped deep in the moral and ethical consciousness of a culture. In fact it is part and parcel of religious *Weltanschauung*. The Qur'an, Islam's primary authority in all matters of individual and communal life, as well as theology and worship, tells of an offer of global trusteeship that was presented by God to the Heavens, the Earth, and the Mountains (Quran 33:72), but they refused to shoulder the responsibility out of fear. Humankind seized the opportunity and bore the "trust" (*amana*), but they were "unjust and very ignorant." Even so, God through mercy has guided and enabled humankind in bearing the responsibility of the *amana*, although they have in the process also been subject to punishment for their hypocrisy and unbelief. The Qur'an, however, is clear that God is the ultimate holder of dominion over the creation (Quran 2:107, 5:120), and that all things return to Him (Quran 24:42) and are thus accountable each in their own ways. There is, in the Qur'an and in the teachings and example of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), preserved in a literary form known as *Hadith*, much with which to construct an authentic Islamic environmental ethic that both sustains what Muslims have achieved traditionally in this direction and leaves open a wide avenue for creative and innovative solutions in the contemporary context (Denny, 1998).

Human-environment interactions exist within dynamic cultural, spatial, and temporal contexts. It is critical that our natural resource management strategies should incorporate elements of local cultures and religions. Take water alone as one of the natural resources, there are numerous references to it and related phenomena in the Qur'an. The word "water" (*ma'*) occurs 63 times and "river" or "rivers" 52 times (Abdul Baqi, 1987). Other words such as "fountains," "springs," "rain," "hail," "clouds," and "wind" occur less frequently. Paradise, which, Muslim believes, is the eternal home of believers and those who do righteous deeds, is often depicted in the Qur'an as having, among other desirable services and objects, running rivers. Furthermore, perhaps the most quoted verse of the Qur'an is our Mother Earth's

endowed with rich natural resources. It testifies to the centrality of our natural resources to life in the ecosystem as a whole, and as the unifying common medium among all living creatures.

Modern literatures, forums and debates have been written and discussed on the Islamic perspective on the environment, such as by Forum Coordinators, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim of Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, United States of America (<http://fore.research.yale.edu/index.html>). However, as with many other aspects of contemporary Muslim life, there is a disconnection between theory and practice. Thus, one can ask that if care for the environment is such an important part of the Islamic tradition then why this subject has not been on the top of the Muslim agenda. The main reason could just be in most poor countries as in the rest of the world economics take precedence over everything else and thus the short term gain trumps the long term adverse effects of environmental degradation.

Moderation in consumption, one of the most important virtues in Islam, is the need of the hour. Abundance of a resource does not justify its wastage, as Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) advised Muslims not to waste water even if they were near a river. Nature has been made subservient to man, but it is as much a creature of God as man is. Neither has man created nature nor is he in any way able to sustain it. It is only because God has given him the sufficiency and capacity cans him in any way do so. Islamic tradition is rich with references to issues like the protection of the environment and even animal rights. In another hadith, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is known to encourage planting trees, admonish cutting down trees even in the times of war and being kind to animals. Even the concept of *halal* and *haram* in food item recognizes certain permissible practices in raising, treating and sacrificing animals. By submitting to God, Islam establishes the bedrock of the relationship between finite, mortal human beings and the infinite Divine, the secular and the sacred (Izzi Dien, 1997). Humans have to accept that they are created beings who act as the "agents" of God on earth. Humans however will become closer to the sacred by operating according to God's instructions. Muhammad is reported to have narrated that God said,

In all of these there are numerous references to the human future and to the environment. The emphasis is that the environment is God's creation and must therefore be treated with care and due attention. Islamic law is based, on unqualified submission to the will of God. This is a fundamental tenet of the Islamic religion, and since Islamic law is based upon Islamic religion, it proceeds on the same fundamental assumption. The will of God embraces all aspects of life and the law hence covers all of

them. It is a path or way guiding the Muslim and the revealed law governing all these matters is known as the *Shari'a*. It is central to its teaching that the entire universe is God's creation. 'Muslims learn from the Qur'an that God created the universe and every single atom and molecule it contains and that the laws of creation include the elements of order, balance and proportion: "*He created everything and determined it most expertly*" and "*It is He who appointed the sun to give radiance and the moon to give light, assigning it in phases...*" The environment contains God's creatures which the 'ulama' or Muslim scholars consider to also deserve protection (*hurma*). The reason for Islam to seek, protect and preserve the environment is that Islam, as a way of life, is established on the concept of good (*khayr*). Therefore, it is expected that Islam will protect the environment once it is understood that such protection is good by itself. The Qur'an states that:

"He whoso do good an atom's weight, will see it. And whoso do ill, an atom's weight will see it. (Qur'an 99: 7-8).

In addition, all human's relationships in Islam have to be based on the concept of justice (*'adl*), and kindness (*ishn*), and not on material or economical gain. The Qur'an strongly emphasizes this concept in the following verse:

"God enjoins justice and kindness" (Quran 16: 90).

In Islam, humans are expected to protect the environment since no other creature is able to perform this task. Humans are the only being that God has "entrusted" with the responsibility of looking after the earth. This trusteeship is seen by Islam to be so onerous and burdensome that no other creature would accept it. The *Quran* (33: 72) says:

"Lo! We offered the trust, Unto the heavens and the Earth and the hills, But they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it and man assumed it. Lo! he is a tyrant and fool"

Accordingly, not every human can claim this appointment, only those who are aware of this caring pact of respect for life can claim it. Qur'an and Hadith have been systematically screened for any hint on forests and environment. It is easy to understand that there are no verses of direct use in forestry, as each tree you plant brings you one step nearer to paradise. Trees have not been of much concern that time and the Qur'an is a metaphysical concept, not a forestry law. But, it is a

general guideline on how to see the world and how to organize life on it. The following 13 Qur'anic verses amongst others mention trees:

7:21 ff.(1), 14:31(2), 19:24(3), 20:118(1), 22:19(1), 24:36(2), 27:61(4), 36:80(4), 37:63-66(5), 54:21(2), 56:29(1)/71(4), 59:6(4), 69:8(2).

Verses marked with (1) concern the tree in paradise, (2) are parables, as 24:36 the light producing, allegorical olive tree in "the niche of the light", (3) the tree maria has to bend to get the dates, (4) Trees as god's creation or cut by his order (as 59:6 or 66:71). As trees produce wood and by products, there are 13 verses mentioning wood and wood products:

7:115/161(1), 11:38(2), 18:71(2), 20:19(1)/40(2), 26:120(2), 27:11(1), 43:35(3), 44:44(4), 54:14(2), 55:25(2), 69:12ff.(2), Fuel wood for the hell: 72:16(5), 111:5(5).

It is therefore very critical to have a balance and equality with our natural resources, as stated *"And the earth we have stretched out and have thrown on it firm mountains, and have caused to grow upon it of everything a measured quantity. And we have made for your means of livelihood therein, and for those for whom ye have not to provide."* (Quran 15:20)

Compassionate Management in Environmental Development: A key directive to and mission for every Muslim is captured in the following Qur'anic verse, which is repeated in many prayers of Muslims: God *"forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion"* (*fahasha, munkar, and baghi*) against His "law or our own conscience" (Yusuf Ali, 1977). In dealing with environmental development, it is forbidden to cut down trees even in the time of war and what more if "Injustice" in the form of wickedness done to the Mother Earth. Absolute destruction of any species of animals or plant is unjustified; timber harvesting rates of our natural forest should not exceed the rate of its natural regeneration. 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. Therefore, pollution and wastefulness of natural resources are prohibited because they are unjust in the way they that jeopardize current and future generations' ability to meet their own needs.

It is a binding obligation to conserve and sustainably develop them both for their own sake and for their value as unique and irreplaceable living resources for the benefit of one another and of mankind. The questions we should ask ourselves are: "Can we check this threat to our

planet simply by introducing stricter legislation against pollution, industrial waste and nuclear spill? Can we reverse the degradation of our environment by adopting conservationist policies on both national and international levels? Or could it be that the whole ecological imbalance betokens the spiritual and teleological crisis of modern civilization itself? Does it require fundamental revision of our own way of life, our cherished goals, indeed our very conception of ourselves and the world?" (Parvez Manzoor, 2002). Well, the Islamic attitude towards the environment that surrounds humanity is not merely restricted to the presence of Allah everywhere but also to other several dimensions. By submitting to Allah, Islam establishes the bedrock of the relationship between finite, mortal human beings and the infinite Divine, the secular and the sacred. This relationship cannot be understood without first realising the meaning of the "submission" that the "created" should concede in his relationship with the Creator. Humans have to accept that they are created beings who act as the "agents" of Allah on earth. These agents are creative in their own way but they are not Allah. Humans, however, will become closer to the sacred by operating according to Allah's instructions. The Prophet (pbuh) in a *Hadith Qudsi* (Divine Hadith), quotes Allah as saying:

"When a worshipper moves closer to me by good virtues and voluntary acts of worship (nawafil), I will be his hearing by which he can hear, I will be his eyes by which he can see, I will be his hand by which he can act, and his feet by which he can walk. If he asks Me [to give him] I will give him what he wants, and if he asks for protection I will protect him." (Al-'Asqalani, 1959: 11, 341).

Islam Propagates Environmental Sustainability: The Islamic perspective on the natural environment is holistic. Everything is seen as important and as interdependent on everything else. God has *"sent down rain from the heavens; and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance."* All environmental media have rights, including a right to natural resources such as water. It has also been mentioned that *"vegetation of all kinds"* and of *"various colours"* are nourished by rainwater that God sends down. Water is made available by God in "order that all life receives its support according to its needs including human, animals and plants (Yusuf Ali, 1997). This points to, among other things, the rights of non-human species to sufficient water that is of "good" quality because the water has to be suitable for irrigation and drinking.

Islam, as a way of life, expects human beings to conserve the environment for several reasons. Firstly, the environment is Allah's creation. The creation of this earth and all its natural resources is a sign of His wisdom, mercy, power and His other attributes and therefore serves to develop human awareness and understanding of this creator. (*Quran 13: 2-4; 21:79*). Secondly, Muslims should seek to protect and preserve the environment because by so doing they protect Allah's creatures which pray to Him and praise Him. Humankind might not be able to understand how these creatures praise Allah but this does not mean that they do not do so, Allah says:

“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!” (Quran 17: 44).

Thirdly, the environment contains Allah's creatures which the Muslim scholars consider to also deserve protection. Finally, also among the reasons why Islam seeks to protect and preserve the environment is that Islam, as a way of life, is established on the concept of good (*khayr*). Therefore it is expected that Islam will protect the environment once it is understood that such protection is good by itself. In Islam, humans are expected to protect the environment since no other creature is able to perform this task. Humans are the only being that Allah has "entrusted" with the responsibility of looking after the earth. This trusteeship is seen by Islam to be so onerous and burdensome that no other creature would 'accept' it. Allah says:

“Lo! We offered the trust unto the heavens and the earth and the hills, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it and man assumed it Lo! he is a tyrant and fool” (Quran 33: 72).

As a way of life, the relationship between humankind and the environment is part of social existence which is based on the fact that everything on earth worships the same God. This worship is not merely ritual practice, since rituals are simply the symbolic human manifestation of submission to Allah. The actual devotions are actions, which can be practised by all the creatures of earth sharing the planet with the human race. Moreover, humans are responsible for the welfare and sustenance of the other living things of this global environment. The Qur'an contains many verses that can be referred to for guidance in this respect. The following verse is one example:

“O people! Worship your Lord, Who hath created you and those before you, so that you may ward off (evil). Who hath appointed the earth a resting-place for you and the sky a canopy; and causeth water to pour down from the sky, thereby producing fruits as food for you. And do not set up rivals to Allah when ye know (better)” (Quran 2: 21-22).

The word in this verse which is translated as "may ward off evil" is in Arabic *tattaqun*. It enjoins piety and awareness which is accompanied by an appreciation of the surrounding environment. In this verse, the Qur'an speaks directly to all groups of people, whether believers, or not. It attempts to mobilize people to the importance of "worshipping Allah" as a symbol and a way of life that enjoins justice and equity in handling the system created by Him.

This system has been placed under human responsibility, to be cared for and not misused as can be concluded by returning to verse 22 of *surah* al-Baqarah. The word *lakum* (for you) in the phrase "created for you" contains the message that the earth is not for one generation but for every generation, past, present and future and that would include humans as well as other creatures on this earth. Accordingly, rivers, minerals are the property of all. This should be distributed fairly and justly especially when it happens to be owned collectively like the Rivers Tigris and Euphrates (www.lamp.ac.uk/trs/staffgallery/mawil_paper.html). Quoted from Dr. Yusuf Al-Qaradawi's *Islamic Concept of Education & Economy as Seen in the Sunnah*, Al-Falah Foundation for Translation, Publication & Distribution, Cairo, 1418 AH, it is quite striking to the fair researchers how the Qur'an and Sunnah cared about the environment. Islam, the true religion of Allah, cares about all aspects of life. No wonder, Islam deals with the minor details of life. Whoever reads the Glorious Qur'an and the Prophet's Sunnah thoroughly will undoubtedly admit this fact as read below:

“Do they not look at the camels how they are created” (Al-Ghashiyah 88: 17).

Here, the Qur'an mentions camels rather than other animals. The reason behind that is to attract the attention to this remarkable animal and calling people to contemplate about its structure, properties and benefits, as it is the closest of the grazing livestock to the Bedouins who are addressed directly by the Qur'an. The Qur'an speaks repeatedly of grazing livestock (camels, sheep, and cattle) rather than other animals that might exist in other areas. The reason is that it wants to attract the attention

of the addressed people to the animals present in the surrounding environment in order to make use of them; be grateful to the Bounties of Allah, to eat its meat and drink its milk. Allah says,

“Pure milk palatable to drinkers” (Quran 16: 66).

Also, to enjoy their sight when you are leading them in the morning and bringing them back in the evening:

“And wherein is beauty for you, when you bring them from home in the evening and as you lead them forth to pasture in the morning” (Quran 16: 6).

The same is mentioned in the Qur’an about the bees; their homes, various kinds, nutritive and medical values in a *Surah* called *An-Nahl* (the bees). Likewise, the Qur’an talks about the date-palm, grapes, crops of diverse flavor, the olive and the pomegranate similar and different. Here, the Qur’an stresses on two important aspects, namely enjoying its beauty:

“Look at their fruits thereof when they bear fruit and upon its ripening” (Quran 5: 99).

and making use of its substance, but paying the due *Zakah* prescribed by Allah:

“Eat of their fruit when they bring fruit, but pay the due thereof (its Zakah according to Allah’s Order) on the day of its harvest. But be not extravagant” (Quran 5: 141).

“Who did transgress beyond bounds in the land (in the disobedience of Allah) and made therein much mischief. So your Lord poured on them different kinds of severe torment. Surely your Lord is Ever-Watchful” (Quran 89: 11-14).

This is like the punishment that came upon the Sheba (Saba’) who did not appreciate the bounties that Allah gave them; the fertile land, the fresh pure water, the sweet-smelling gardens, and they showed reluctance, neglected the land and wasted their source of bounty. Allah (Exalted and Almighty) says:

“There was indeed a sign for Sheba in their dwelling-place: Two gardens on the right hand and the left (as who should say): Eat of the provision of your Lord and render thanks to Him. A fair land and an indulgent Lord! But they were forward, so We sent on them the flood of ‘Iram, and in exchange for their two

gardens gave them two gardens bearing bitter fruit, the tamarisk and here and there a lote-tree. This We awarded them because of their ingratitude. Punish We ever any save the ingrates” (Quran’ 34: 15-17).

Shedding more light on this issue, we wish to cite that many people express their concern these days about the preservation of the environment, so much so that this has become a trend worldwide. It is interesting to indicate here that an increasing number of people in the West ask about the position of Islam toward the environment. First of all, Islam makes it incumbent on every Muslim to contribute his/her share in improving greenery. Muslims should be active in growing more trees for the benefit of all people. In one tradition the Prophet says:

“If the Hour is about to take place while any one of you has a sapling in his hand, which he can cultivate before it takes place, let him cultivate it for he will be rewarded for it.”

CONCLUSION

Islam considers all creatures to be Almighty Allah’s slaves. They surrender to His laws, and every creature has his form and method of worship. They all glorify Allah, each in his own way. Thus, Islam establishes a relationship of true love and harmony between man and all creation. Again, Islam has in fact introduced a more comprehensive meaning of environment or nature. It considers man the major factor in this universe and defined for him a course of action and behaviour that makes him an ideal model. In this context, Islam enjoins the protection of human nature. Human life is so sacred in the sight of Islam that no one is permitted to take the life of another person except as life for life and suicide is a crime in Islam.

Next, the concept of cleanliness prevails among people. Islam is not only keen on outward cleanliness but has its own guidelines in inward cleanliness. The Prophet (pbuh) said:

“Five things are in harmony with nature: cutting one’s moustache, removing hair of the armpit, shaving the pubic region, trimming one’s nails and circumcision.”

It enjoins avoiding eating onions or garlic before attending public meetings to prevent bad odour. It is the duty of Muslims to remove dirt and obstacles from roads and streets. This is an act of worship in Islam. Cleanliness of front and back yards is encouraged also. The Prophet

(pbuh) says: "Allah is beautiful and He loves the beautiful." Islam commands Muslims to avoid all bad habits that are harmful to their bodies and to other people, like smoking, drug addiction, alcoholic drinks, etc. (www.al-muslim.org). The Prophet Muhammad, God's blessing and peace be upon him, declared that "The whole earth has been created as a place of worship for me, pure and clean."

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