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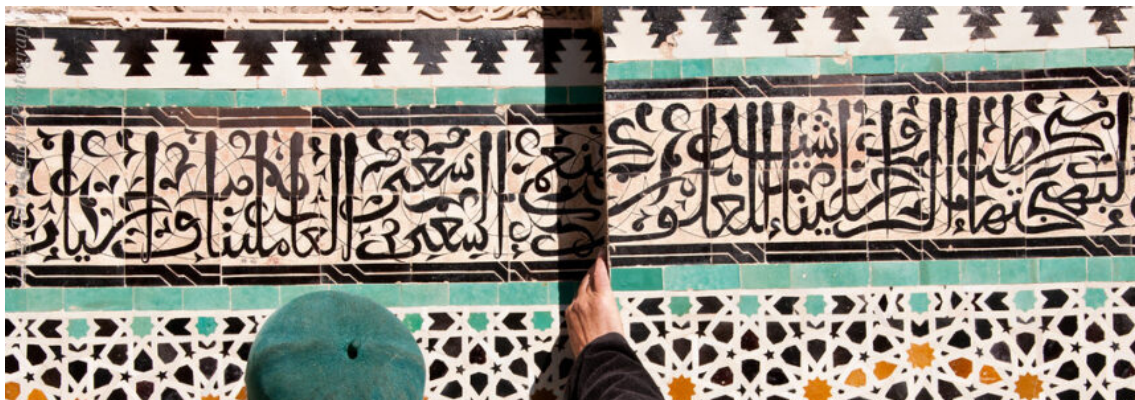
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“He laid out the earth for all living creatures”: Islam’s lessons for climate

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Islamic teachings are full of invocations to Muslims to revere nature, reject over-consumption, and live within planetary boundaries.



In recent years, Islamic scholars and environmental experts have gathered together on numerous occasions to discuss the relationship between Islam and the environment. At the recent “Islam and Climate Emergency” conference, organised by the High Atlas Foundation with the Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University in Fes, Morocco, for instance, participants shared ideas on how the world’s second biggest religion (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1239494/share-of-muslim-population-in-africa-by-country/>) – followed by around 2 billion people worldwide, including around 500 million in Africa – can serve as a model for environmental stewardship in a time of crisis (<https://africanarguments.org/category/african-arguments/climate/>).

Islamic teachings have a lot to tell Muslims about our relationship to nature. In fact, the very root of the word Islam, “Silm”, means peace, referring not just to peace among humankind but with all living creatures and the wider environment. Ahead of Eid, below is a collection of concepts in Islam that can guide us in our understanding of environmental degradation, climate change, and of Muslims’ role in responding to these challenges.

Preserving Allah’s blessings

The principles of Islam encourage humans to live in harmony with nature and to treat the environment with respect and reverence. This is evident in the teachings of the Quran and the Hadith, which contain numerous references to the environment and the responsibility of people to care for it. Both explain that humans were appointed as stewards of Allah’s creation and that the obligation of people as caliphs on earth is to maintain and take care of it as part of *Amana* (trust).

Verse 7 of Surah Al-Kahf states: “Indeed, We have made that which is on the earth adornment for it that We may test them [as to] which of them is best in deeds.” This verse explains that Allah has created nature to beautify earth and make it a source of pleasure for our eyes and hearts. However, it also emphasises that this creation serves a higher purpose, which is to test humanity to show their good deeds and demonstrate their piety by leaving the environment as Allah created it. The verse expresses the importance of a wise and responsible handling of the environment, lest there be negative consequences for humanity and life on earth.

Extravagance and balance

In Islam, extravagance are considered one of the major sins and followers are urged to avoid waste. Instead, followers are actively called up to practice moderation and to preserve the blessings Allah has bestowed upon humans by using resources wisely. As Allah almighty says in Surah Al-Baqarah, 60: "Eat and drink from the provision of Allah, and do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption."

Relatedly, the Islamic notion of *Mizan* refers to the importance of balance. This concept is often linked to the idea of justice as it implies a state of equilibrium that is fair and just. Allah, we are told, created earth in perfect equilibrium. As stated in the Quran: "He raised the heaven and established the balance so that you would not transgress the balance. Give just weight – do not skimp in the balance. He laid out the earth for all living creatures" (Ar Rahman, 7-10).

These concepts of moderation, preservation, and balance call upon Muslims to respect planetary limits and the symbiotic ecosystems on which all creatures rely to survive.

Islamic law

Maqasid al-Sharia (the objectives of Islamic law) also relate to the environment. These concepts are the very essence of the religion as they facilitate the functioning of societies and enhance the public good.

In Islamic law, the preservation of the five necessities (known as *al-daruriyyat al-khams*) – is considered a fundamental objective. These are: religion (*al-din*), life (*al-nafs*), intellect (*al-aql*), lineage (*al-nasl*), and property (*al-mal*). The maintenance of these goods are all closely related to the environment, which plays a critical role in sustaining human life and supporting human well-being.

Many Muslim religious practices, for instance, rely on the availability of natural resources, such as water, air, and food. The preservation of life requires the protection of the Earth's climate and biodiversity. Intellectual development derives inspiration from the natural world, which is also important for mental and cognitive health. The maintenance of lineage requires good reproductive health and family stability, both of which are threatened by climate crises and environmental toxicity. And the preservation of property rests on the preservation and responsible use of natural resources.

Islam's teaching on humanity's relationship with the climate is further rooted in its fundamental moral principles. Prophet Muhammad, may Allah's prayers and peace be upon him, explained the necessity of preserving the environment in several hadiths, albeit indirectly. For example, the hadith "There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm" indicates, in the broader sense, that humans should be responsible for their actions and refrain from causing harm to each other, whether directly or indirectly by disrupting the environment in which they live.

Another hadith calls on Muslims to plant trees, stating: "If the Resurrection were established upon one of you while he has in his hand a sapling, then let him plant it."

Taking action

There are many teachings in Islam that require Muslims to preserve the environment, avoid causing harm to it, and to maintain this great blessing Allah has granted us. Various Quranic verses and hadiths urge us to think about Allah's perfectly balanced creation and to preserve it for future generations. As such, Islam implores its 2 billion followers to take the climate crisis – which is caused by a lack of respect for equilibrium, moderation and reverence – seriously and to take collective action.

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