



# Interfaith Power & Light

A Religious Response to Global Warming

**Dr. Hamid Mavani**

Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California

Temple Beth El, Berkeley

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“He Who has spread out the earth for you and threaded roads for you therein and has sent down water from the sky: With it have We brought forth diverse kinds of vegetation. Eat and pasture your cattle; verily, in this are signs for men endued with understanding.”

The word Islam, as you are well aware, has two significations, namely submission or surrender and peace. Complete peace, ie. inward and outward is attainable through voluntary submission to the divine will and living a life in accordance with the divine prescription. This attribute of peace has to be manifested by being at peace with oneself, with fellow human beings, with the animal species and with nature. From the Islamic perspective, all that is on the earth was created to serve humanity and human beings were delegated to make use of the resources as the deputy and vicegerent of God. Human being is a trustee and will be asked to respond to how he/she executed his stewardship of the earth on the Day of Reckoning. The story of mankind's appointment as the deputy of God in executing His will is given in the Qur'an as follows:

“And when your Lord said to the angels, I am going to place in the earth a khalifa (vicegerent), they said: What, will you place in it such as shall make mischief in it and shed blood, while we celebrate your praise and extol your holiness? He said, Surely I know what you do not know. And He taught Adam all the names, then presented them to the angels; then He said: Tell me the names of those if you are right. (2:30-31)”

The importance of this vicegerency and trusteeship is again underscored in another passage of the Qur'an where God offers the trust to the mountains, heavens and the earth but all of them decline to accept such an onerous and burdensome trust, however, human being took up the challenge and accepted the trust.

“Surely we offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to shoulder it but mankind accepted the trust. Surely he is unjust and ignorant” 33:72

“Man can use the trust for his benefit but has no absolute right to do as he wishes. The trust must be preserved and handed back to its rightful owner. Man is accountable for the misuse of his trust. The US which has 4 per cent of the population produces 21 per cent of the greenhouse gases.”

In the discussion of environmental ethics, three concepts from the Qur'an are pertinent. One is the concept of trusteeship that was delegated to human beings to execute the divine will and establish an ethically sound public order. Second, is the concept of the Transcendent creator who has created

*A Campaign of The Regeneration Project*

220 Montgomery Street, Suite 450, San Francisco, CA 94104

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everything in due proportion and that this balance should be preserved. Everything that God has created in the universe is created in due proportion and measure such that an imbalance in this scheme would result in negative consequences: “Verily, all things have We created by measure.” “And we have produced therein everything in balance. Third, is the concept of accountability at the end of time to measure the extent to which human beings lived up to the ideals prescribed by God.”

Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: “Whosoever plants a tree and diligently looks after it until it matures and bears fruit is rewarded.” “The world is green and beautiful and God has appointed you his stewards over it.”

“And the earth We have spread out; set thereon mountains firms and immovable; and produced therein all kinds of things in due balance.” (67:1-4)

“He it is who has created for you everything on earth and has made subservient to you whatever is in the heavens and the earth and granted you His bounties, manifest and hidden” 31:20

Mankind is entitled to enjoy the many blessings in creation as God’s trustee but at the same time is informed not to squander and abuse the environment. Further, the resources are for the use and enjoyment of all and not for a privileged nation or individual. “If the hour of the end of the world is about to take place while anyone of you has a sapling in his hand, which he can cultivate, let him cultivate it for he will be rewarded.”

God offered to heaven, earth and mountains the “trust” of watching over creation. They declined out of fear, so God offered the trust to humankind. Adam accepted, unjust and foolish as he was and ungrateful in addition. When God informed the angels that creation would be entrusted to Adam as His representative, they warned the Creator that human beings would surely act wickedly. God assured the angels that the risk was worth taking.

I have spoken only of the Islamic tradition’s ideals without taking a hard look at how Muslim communities have actually behaved. In general, it would probably be accurate to say that we have played no small part in sacrificing the earth on the altar of the great god Profit!

We can’t save the natural world except by rediscovering the sacred in nature.

A jihad (exertion, effort) to preserve nature, or a green jihad for addressing the global environmental crisis.