



Interfaith Power & Light

A Religious Response to Global Warming

Global Warming

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Global warming is known to be the trapping of gases in the earth's atmosphere. When the gases are trapped, the earth's overall temperature may increase; this is why global warming is also known as the "greenhouse gas effect."

Some greenhouse gases occur naturally in the atmosphere, while others result from human activities. Naturally occurring greenhouse gases include water vapor, carbon dioxide, and ozone, among other elements. Certain human activities, however, add to the levels of most of these naturally occurring gases, leading to increase in temperatures. The increasing temperatures may be followed by a large variety of other problems for mankind, like El Nino.

Almost one third of the Qur'an speaks about the Creation, as signs of God. Our human race is among the creation of God. He made us His deputies to manage the earth we live in according to His manual, not according to our selfish and greedy desires. Thus, God's creation including the planet earth is sacred. If we follow the intention of our creation, we must also be sacred in dealing with the planet earth. But we desired not to be. And here where our problems with God and His creation have started.

The Qur'an says:

"God has made subservient to you all that is in the heavens and the earth, coming from Him; therein are signs for those who reflect."(45:12)

The Qur'an often designates God as the one who does what is beautiful in His creation. If God does what is beautiful through creating human beings, human beings have the obligation to do what is beautiful in their relationships with God and other creatures. As God says in the Qur'an:

"Could the reward of goodness be anything but goodness?" (55:60)

In another verse, God says:

"Do what is beautiful, as God has done what is beautiful to you."(28:77)

One example in the beauty of God's creation is the sun and its light that shines and its warm that heats. Once the sun rises, it replaces all man-made light we created during the night. Can any human being create something similar to the light of the sun?

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As God challenges us in several places in the Qur'an:

“This is God’s creation; now show Me what those you call upon other than Him have created! Surely the transgressors are in manifest error.”(31:11).

What would happen to earth and the moon if the sun ceases to function? This is the type of reflection that Allah expects us to be occupied with in order to appreciate His creation. As He says in the Qur'an:

“And to God belongs the Control of the heavens and the earth and God has power over all things. Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the disparity of the night and day, there are Signs for those who possess minds. Those who praise God standing, sitting or lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, Our Lord, You have not created this in vain, glory be to You! So save us from the punishment of Fire.”(3:189-191)

Knowing our weakness, God warned mankind in several verses in the Qur'an:

“Ö do not seek corruption on earth; surely, God does not love those who corrupt (earth).”(28:77)

In the Chapter of the Qur'an, called the Merciful, God says:

“The sun and the moon follow precise courses And the sky God raised it high, and He has established the due Balance.”(55:5, 7)

The sun and the moon move in their orbit in perfect succession, according to precise calculation that is never delayed nor disturbed. Examples from the Qur'an can shed light on this perfection and precision in this due balance and in this creation.

“It is not for the sun to catch up the moon, nor does the night outshine the day. Each one is traveling in an orbit with its own motion.”(36:40)

“He causes the dawn to break and made the night for rest, and the sun and the moon for calculating. Such is the measuring of the Almighty, the All-Knowing.”(6:96)

After God cited the importance of this due balance in His creation, he ordered us not to disturb this delicate balance:

“Do not ever tamper with this balance.”(55:8)

Have we observed this due balance or God-given equilibrium that God has asked us to maintain in His last memo to mankind?

Today there is a great deal of talk about environmental equilibrium at the very moment when this God-given equilibrium is being destroyed by modern man in his revolt against God and against his own inner nature.

I remember that I read some place that the natural average age of the human being is 120 years. We shortened our lives by what we eat, by what we drink, the style of life we chose to live, and by what we did to God's creation around us. Our human minds are establishing their own standards, instead of following the divine guidance. Arrogance has led us to believe that we are gods, not that we are under

God. No wonder we are missed up, and we missed the nature around us! We failed miserably in our delegated duty to handle our responsibilities toward this earth. We seek rights, but we shy away from responsibility. We deserve what we face.

That is why God declares:

“Corruption has overtaken in land and sea, for what the hands of mankind have done, that He may let them taste some of what they have done, hoping they may return to the way of God. Say: Travel through the land and see what was the end of those who came before you; most of them were ungrateful.”(30:41-42)

According to one of the early interpreters of the Qur’an, Ibn Kathir, he says that human beings are facing a lot of shortfalls because of their disobedience of God and because of ruining the natural resources God has created. Whoever disobeys Allah in the earth has corrupted it. Why? Because the good condition of the earth depends on obedience to Allah in His commands to preserve all aspects of life, spiritually, economically, socially, politically, and the nature; this is because Islam is a way of life. And if they failed to obey God, then He tries them with the loss of wealth, souls, and crops through various calamities. This includes natural disasters and imbalance in the atmosphere and environments that affect their health and their lives. The reason for this trial is a test and a punishment for what they have done, hoping they come back to their senses from their disobedience. What happened to previous nations who were guided through previous messengers must be a vivid reminder of what is happening to mankind nowadays globally.

“And that He destroyed the former Aad; and Thamood, and He did not spare them; and the people of Noah before, surely they were most unjust and rude: and the city of the people of Lot He destroyed; So He covered them with that which covered. Which of your Lord’s bounties will you then dispute? This is a Warner, of the warners of old. The Judgment Day is approaching. None but God can avert it. Do you then wonder at this talk: And you laugh, instead of weeping, and you indulge in vanities!....”(54:50-56)

My Fellow inhabitant of the planet earth, what should we do?

Whatever knowledge we obtain, we must put it to good use, benefiting humanity in ways that would not harm the environment.

We must give the divine guidance the significant role in solving environmental problems. We must resort to religious ethics, not secular ethics, to solve the problems of global warming. Whatever God made sacred, must be treated as sacred in dealing with it. As God ordered us:

“Do not spread corruption in the earth, after it has been set right.”(7:56)

Our focus as Muslims and members of the human race must be for caring for each other and for the earth that contains us. By destroying it, we are destroying ourselves. There is no escape! Time has come to stop this madness of claiming superiority over each other in matter of faith and to start working with each other to preserve our sense of brotherhood and sisterhood in order to survive. Time has also come to stop this madness of feeling superior over nature and start protecting the only planet earth we have to share with other species who happen to rely on us for their existence.

Protection of the natural environment is “an Islamic obligation.” All activities causing irreversible damage to the environment are forbidden in Islam. It is heartening to see grassroots Muslims are actively involved in maintaining environment in livable condition.

The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, founded in the mid-1980 has been active in this environmental field. The Foundation states that “Allah entrusted man with the guardianship of the Earth. We have to fulfill that ancient trust now, before it becomes too late.” The Foundation has set up an extensive training program in environmental teachings based on the Qur’an. It promotes self-sufficiency in farming through organic agriculture and perm culture, and it serves as a demonstration center for solar technology, water wheels, waste recycling and wind power. The foundation distributes a teaching pack entitled Qur’an Creation and Conservation, and it is setting up the Muslim Alliance for Conservation as an international grassroots organization.

In his new book, “The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity”, published in 2002, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University, touched on the subject of Islam and environment. He states that environmental crisis is primarily the consequence of an inner malaise that gives human beings unlimited power over nature. This malaise has resulted in the reduction of nature to only a resource for economic production. Islam environmental matters are treated in the sources and applications of Islamic Law, whereas man-made environmental laws seem to be trying to “catch up” with the problems caused by man misuse. The traditional Islamic view is totally opposed to modern relation between human beings and nature. This relation has caused unprecedented harm to the natural environment, has led to the loss of many species, and now threatens the very future of human life on earth.

On the basis of the Qur’an and Hadith, the Shari’ah, Dr. Nasr says, has extensive teachings, both legal and moral, concerning the natural environment: the way that animals should be treated kindly, trees preserved and not cut unless absolutely necessary, vegetation guarded even in war, running water protected, and many other relevant issues. The Prophet himself was always very kind to animals. As for trees, he emphasized the significance of creating what is today called green space; He said,

“It is a blessed act to plant a tree even if it be a day before the end of the world.”

Dr. Nasr Continues, the Shari’ah promulgates certain general principles concerning the environment, such as that of balance (miz’ān) between all parts of God’s creation, the prohibition of waste, and respect for all life forms, and specific injunctions, such as the creation of protected areas for wildlife

A whole new branch of the Shari’ah is now being developed on the basis of the traditional sources of the Divine Law to address the crucial problems posed by the environmental crisis. This branch of the Shari’ah is one of the most challenging and dynamic aspects of it in the present day. (The heart of Islam, pp 142-144, 2002)

Finally, we must be concerned with the well-being of our brothers and sisters in the human race. Our thinking and priority will completely change if we believe in the Golden rule that many religions share with Islam: “Love to your brothers and sisters in humanity what you love to yourself.” If we believed and implemented this rule, there will be no room for greed or envy.

Islamic teachings promote the protection of the earth's ecosystems, safeguard public health and ensure sufficient and sustainable energy for all. Maintaining your body and soul in the condition that God intended them to be is an obligation on each Muslim.

The 45,000 Muslims in the Sacramento Valley join people of all faiths in requesting our public officials in cutting greenhouse gas emissions by investing in energy efficiency and by buying renewable energy generated from God's created gifts, the wind, the sun and natural resources.

May God guide us to be true faithful as guardians to God's creation and maintain the planet earth in the way the Creator wanted it to be.