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### Going Green: How Islam Will Save the Planet

From surging seas, to harsh heat waves, to endangered ecosystems; all of these conditions demonstrate the magnitude of a drastic crisis that the entire world faces: global warming. It is determined as the rise of global temperatures which adversely contribute to the greenhouse effect and large-scale shifts of weather patterns, and we have already begun to face the repercussions of this catastrophe. In spite of this, many of us fail to recognize the imminent danger of climate change; and that these outcomes are, in fact, the result of us becoming the assailants of our own planetary home. As we undergo this phenomenon, more consequences are yet to come and further disturb the balance of nature which impacts us all.

To understand the matter of global warming, it is essential that we identify the contributing factors which amplify its hazard on us. It is, indeed, us humans who have been thwarting the proliferation of flora and fauna by our thoughtless activities that endanger their ecosystems and quality of life. For instance, with the continuous decrease of the forest ecosystem, deforestation has been eradicating the biodiversity of forests as well as surrounding people and their occupations. Trees which hold carbon dioxide are destroyed in the process of deforestation, and the harmful gas is released into the atmosphere. Consequently, the planet's overall ability to capture carbon dioxide is altered, and this negatively contributes to the greenhouse effect which impacts climate change.

What is truly extraordinary is that our contributions to global warming not only abuse nature but also sabotage the lives of our fellow human beings as well. This can be identified in water pollution as our contamination of water poses a serious threat not just to aquatic life, but impacts the water supply needed by humans as well. From harmful emissions of industrial activity, the water we tarnish with our own poor management, in turn, leads to catastrophes such as contracting diseases, the lack of potable water, and, according to the UN, even infant mortality.

This brings us to the realization that we have the unavoidable duty to take accountability for our wasteful splurges of Earth's resources, which have brought about immense damage to all forms of life. Rather, we must seek to ensure fair treatment of all species, resources, and our own people whom we have aggrieved. Undertaking this requires us to acquaint ourselves with the approach of environmental justice, which is "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies."

When we ponder upon our role of stewardship for the environment as Muslims, the effort weighs just as heavily on our shoulders as it does for any other obligatory task. It is our right and responsibility as Muslims to partake in this form of social justice: for both the restoration of the environment, as well as fulfilling an obligation which is of significant stature in Islam. It is our duty to inspire and encourage the rest of humanity coming from different backgrounds, nations, religions, and ethnicities to hold hands with us in this great mission and help protect the home our Creator has provided us. We must also aid our fellow brothers and sisters who are victims of the harmful acts that are destructive to their homes, as they are denied the environmental justice which they are in need of.

Caring for the environment and fighting against the issues of climate change and global warming are not only an environmental responsibility for us, but a social equity as well. In fact, this global crisis has been disproportionately impacting minorities and marginalized communities. Environmental racism has been a large issue at hand as many underserved communities must face denied environmental justice. For instance, residents of Flint, Michigan noticed contamination in their water supply back in 2014. However, it took well over a year for state officials to address the issue which they had initially dismissed instead. With the city comprising an 84% black population, the Michigan Civil Rights Commission verified that the elongated water crisis was largely due to racism.

These issues are largely generated from the same origins which bolster global warming and its ailments. Thus, we are liable to fix these issues both at large, and on a small-scale. It is here that we wonder: what is the most promising and effective method of doing this? How do we, as Muslims, solve the prodigious issues of our depleting resources, our damaged ecosystems, and the ones who have been disadvantaged by these issues? To understand what we must do to compensate for these losses, it is fundamental that we first try to understand the stance of taking care of the environment in our beloved religion of Islam.

Just as our bodies and possessions are trusts given to us by Allah, so is our very home of the Earth and everything facilitating it. From the soil of the land itself to all creatures who reside upon it, all elements of nature are in a continuous state of worship towards Allah. From flora to fauna, and even the non-living components of our environment such as teeming rivers, eroding rocks, and flowing winds; they are all outstanding creations that remarkably show their devotion to Allah just as we do as Muslims. Rather than destroying the earth and using it to our advantage,

we should seek to better ourselves by tending to it and learning from the abiding dedication which the very Earth itself exemplifies towards our Lord.

Maintaining the balance and harmony of natural resources and habitats should not be just a mere errand or minimal task. As mentioned earlier, the obligation of looking after our Earth is a priority and one that implores us to provide just as much importance to it as we do to other tasks. One may speculate about why we should go to the extent of inconveniencing ourselves with such a matter. Why should we be thoughtful enough to purchase reusable bottles which we *know* are more eco-friendly than disposable plastic bottles? Why should we take the extra step to commute by means other than transportation which releases exhaust into the atmosphere? Why should we engage ourselves in such activities which seem so trivial?

It is because, other than the power to protest for environmental policies to be implemented by the government or to partake in organizations and activities which have the ability to take large leaps for change, our own religion establishes the fundamentals for protecting our environment. From our own religion came the first environmentalist over 1400 years ago, one who was mindful of every crevice and corner of nature. How are we to push boundaries and advocate for change if we do not look back and model the environment's best advocate in the history of mankind? How could we not follow the example of the one who implemented simple yet fundamental environment-friendly practices that only came into consideration within the past century?

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the ideal example of who we would call a "tree-hugger" today. It is to our very wonderment that when we look back to the history of the Prophet, we find that hugging a tree was, strikingly, just what he had done! Once, a pulpit had been made out of date palm for our Prophet to deliver the Friday sermon on, and he proceeded

towards it only to hear the inanimate object cry out loud like a child. The Prophet, in all his kindness and humility, embraced the pulpit until it quieted. (Sahih al-Bukhari 3584; Book 61, Hadith 93). How wonderful is such a display of affection towards an inanimate object which the rest of us would not consider to even think twice about? How stunning and moving is it that he cuddled a pulpit made out of a tree, an object which is created for the purpose of standing on it, like a human child? This goes to show just how we should break the boundaries when it comes to protecting the environment: by increasing our love for it first.

In another instance, the Prophet also mentioned to his companions the story of a man who had gone down a well to quench his thirst. When he came out, the man saw a panting dog licking the ground because it was thirsty. Out of empathy, he had gone back into the well to retrieve water in his shoe for the dog. Allah forgave the man for his deed. When his companions questioned the Prophet if one gets rewarded for helping animals, he responded that there is a reward in helping *any* living being (Bukhari). The importance of compassion towards animals is evident in this narration, and highlights the higher rewards that one receives for doing so. Not only is caring for animals morally excellent, but as Muslims, there is something to gain from it as well. The story also emphasizes the same level of importance which animals should be given compared to humans, as the Prophet mentioned that we will be rewarded for helping “any living being”.

We have seen how showing humanity towards both living and non-living elements of our environment is crucial in our mission to protect nature. But the magnitude of acts like the ones previously mentioned are beyond our comprehension. Imam Bukhari, a highly respected figure of knowledge who had been imperative to the preservation of our religion by Allah’s will, stated, “If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, it

is regarded as a charitable gift (sadaqah) for him.” To develop on the notion set forth by the Prophet’s narrations, one can clearly derive that not only is the act of planting beneficial for the environment which in turn will benefit us as well; but, as Muslims, taking care of the environment is beneficial for our Hereafter as well. The accumulation of good deeds we may receive for all the beings who benefit from the planting of a single seed is incomprehensible.

Islam has given us many reasons for why we should preserve and assist in the production of all habitants on our Earth. Additionally, our religion warns us of the grave consequences upon us if we do not do so as well and inflict harm upon the environment instead. The Prophet’s warning of a curse being upon one who relieves themselves under the shade of trees, in a walkway, or in a watering place implies just that. (Ranked Hasan, by Al-Albani). Relieving oneself near the refuge which nature has to offer is a poor environmental practice, and it violates the rights of the Earth. If we fail to meet both social and environmental responsibilities which protecting nature entails, it backfires upon us as Muslims and leaves us in peril in both this world and the Hereafter.

Furthermore, the current situation of many Muslims around the world is a result of our failure to protect the Earth. Many Muslim nations bear the brunt of climate change, which has been a result of our poor stewardship of the environment. Places such as Turkey, Bangladesh, and the Middle East that are largely Muslim-populated face issues of water availability, climate refugees, and extreme heatwaves. All of these living conditions which our fellow brothers and sisters currently have to live through are the result of the harmful, wasteful, and careless acts we have either inflicted upon the environment, or failed to prevent. As Muslims, we will be held accountable for this on the Day of Judgment if we do not begin to amend these situations through reparations and begin to change our ways to defend the trust given to us by Allah.

To improve the lives of all beings which Islam dictates us to do, we must engage in eco-friendly solutions that seek to solve the environmental issues at hand. One method which we see in application today is one that was upheld by our Prophet himself centuries ago: afforestation, which is defined as the “establishment of a forest or trees in an area where there was no previous tree cover”. The Prophet emphasized that even if the Day of Judgment were to come upon us and we happened to carry a seed or sapling in our hand, then we should plant it. (Musnad Aḥmad 12491; Sahih according to Al-Albani). The power of this statement is one of surety and resonance, for the Prophet is telling us that even if the end of the world were to approach and destroy everything, it should still not prevent us from fulfilling our duty of preserving nature; even if it means planting the single seed which is bound to be destroyed. The weight of this command speaks of the greatness of preserving nature till the end, and also promotes a method that combats carbon dioxide accumulation in the atmosphere.

With the current dire water crisis looming over the world, it would be valuable for us to revisit the advice our Prophet gave us hundreds of years ago: the conservation of resources. The Prophet was once performing ablution with his companion Sa’d at a river, and he questioned Sa’d for his misuse of water. Sa’d had learned at that moment from the Prophet that there can even be squandering of water at a flowing river where the water is bountiful and endless, and even for an act such as ablution (Ibn Majah). As Muslims, do we stop to consider the quantity of water in our daily use today? About how many times do we leave our sink taps running at full capacity, wasting great loads of water? With every small activity, we should be mindful of our use of resources, and ensure that we are not reckless with them.

With all of this duly noted, it is reasonable to say that as the followers of Islam, we must reconsider and reevaluate what we have given back to the bounty of nature. Allah asks us in the

Qur'an, in Surah Al-Waqi'ah, if we ever considered the water sent upon us which we drink. He reminds us that He could have made drinking water salty for us, and asks us if even then we will be ungrateful to Him. It is time to open up our hearts and minds to the blessings we have been provided through the means of the Earth; and how we can improve and preserve the condition of our home, of all species and objects which reside upon it, and of those of us who are not in such fortunate conditions. It is time to nourish our Dunya using our Deen, and aspire for the best of both this world and the next.



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