



Islam and the Environment

There are several Islamic principles that, when taken individually, seem to have little bearing on conservation. Together, however, they add up to a clear concept of the Islamic view on conservation.

The first Islamic principle that relates to conservation is that of the Oneness of Allah, or Tawheed. This principle is absolutely fundamental to Islam. Every Muslim must believe in this Oneness of Allah. It is said by some Ulamaa that some two-thirds of Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) early preaching—and indeed of the Qur'an itself—were and are dedicated purely to endorsing this very Oneness of Allah. One indivisible God means to a Muslim that there is no separate deity for each of the many attributes that to Muslims belong to the One Universal God who is also God of the Universe. God says in the Qur'an: *Say: He is Allah the One and Only; Allah the Eternal Absolute; He begetteth not nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him. (112.001-4)... God is Real, not an abstract idea or concept; He is One, the Everlasting Refuge for all creation.*

The emphasis on Tawheed is significant in itself but it is even more relevant to the present discussion by virtue of defining a Muslim's relationship to Allah. The Omniscience and Omnipotence of Allah means, by definition, that a Muslim's relationship to Allah is total. To Him—and to Him only—should humans refer for all their needs: physical, mental, and spiritual. Indeed, Allah would not have it any other way. As He says in the Qur'an: *Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set up with him; but He forgiveth anything else to whom He pleaseth; to set up partners with Allah is to devise a sin most heinous in deed. 004.048.*

Yet another principle that underpins Islamic commitment to the conservation of nature and natural resources is the principle of divine ownership of all that exists on earth and in the heavens—animate and inanimate. *To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs. 004.171 To Him belongeth all that dwelleth [or lurketh] in the night and the day. For He is the One Who heareth and knoweth all things. 006.013.* To Him belongs what is in the heavens and on earth and all between them and all beneath the soil

The most important of this second set of principles is that which defines the human role and responsibilities in the natural order that Allah provided. The appointment of people as Khalifa, or guardians, is the sacred duty God has given to the human race. Several times in the Qur'an, man is invited to make use of the nourishing goods that Allah has placed on earth for him, but abuse—particularly through extravagance and excess—is strictly forbidden. *O children of Adam! ... eat and drink: but waste not by excess for Allah loveth not the wasters. 007.031.*

Fitra can be taken as perhaps the most direct injunction by Allah to man to conserve the environment and not to change the balance of His creation. This is specifically contained in the verse below: *So set thou thy face steadily and truly to the Faith: [Establish] Allah's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind: no change [let there be] in the work [wrought] by Allah: that is the standard Religion: but most among mankind understand not. 030.030.*

As we indicated at the beginning, there are several Qur'anic principles that, taken separately, do not have an obvious connection with conservation. But taken in their totality, they state in clear terms that Allah, the One True God is the Universal God and the Creator of the Universe and indeed, the Owner of the Universe. To Him belong all the animate and inanimate objects, all of whom should or do submit themselves to Him. Allah, in His Wisdom, appointed humans, the creatures that He has conferred with the faculty of reason and with free will, to be His vice regents on earth. And while Allah has invited people to partake of the fruits of the earth for their rightful nourishment and enjoyment, He has also directed them not to waste that which Allah has provided for him—for He loveth not wasters. Furthermore, Allah has also ordered humans to administer his responsibilities with Justice. Above all, people should conserve the balance of Allah's creation on Earth. By virtue of their intelligence, humanity (when it believes in the One Universal Allah, the Creator of the Universe) is the only creation of Allah to be entrusted with the overall responsibility of maintaining planet Earth in the overall balanced ecology that man found. If biologists believe that humans are the greatest agents of ecological change on the surface of the earth, is it not humans who, drawn from the brink, will—for their own good—abandon Mammon and listen to the prescriptions of God on the conservation of their environment and the environment of all the creatures on earth? The Islamic answer to this question is decisively in the affirmative.

Adapted from: <http://www.arcworld.org/faiths.asp?pageID=75>