

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN ISLAM (PART 5 OF 7): THE CONSERVATION OF BASIC NATURAL ELEMENTS - PLANTS AND ANIMALS (1)

Rating: 4.3

Description: The Islamic view of the role of plants and animals in the environment and conservation of this vital element is fundamental to the preservation and continuation of life (part 1).

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By: Dr. A. Bagader, Dr. A. El-Sabbagh, Dr. M. Al-Glayand, and Dr. M. Samarrai (edited by IslamReligion.com)

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4. Plants and Animals

There is no denying the importance of plants and animals as living resources of enormous benefit, without which neither man nor other species could survive. God has not made any of His creatures worthless: every single form of life is the product of a special and intricate development by God, and each warrants special respect. As a living genetic resource, each species and variety is unique and irreplaceable. Once lost, it is lost forever.

By virtue of their unique function of producing food from the energy of the sun, plants constitute the basic source of sustenance for animal and human life on earth. God has said:

“Then let man consider his nourishment: that We pour down the rain in showers, and We split the earth in fragments, and therein make the grain to grow, and vines and herbs, and olives and palms, and gardens of dense foliage, and fruits and fodder - provision for you and your cattle.” (Quran 80:24-32)

In addition to their importance as nourishment, plants enrich the soil and protect it from erosion by wind and water. They conserve the water by detaining its runoff; they moderate the climate and produce the oxygen which we breathe. They are also of immense value as medicines, oils, perfumes, waxes, fibers, timber, and fuel. God has said in the Glorious Quran,

“Have you seen the fire you kindle? Was it you who grew its timber or did We grow it? We have made it a reminder, and a comfort for the desert dwellers.” (Quran 56:71-73)

Animals in turn provide sustenance for plants, for one another, and for man. Their dung and their bodies enrich the soil and the seas. They contribute to the atmosphere by respiration and by their movements and migrations contribute to the distribution of plants. They provide food for one another and provide mankind with leather, hair and wool, medicines and perfumes, and means of conveyance, as well as meat, milk, and honey. And for their highly developed senses and perceptions and their social interrelationships, animals are accorded special regard in Islam. For God considers them living societies exactly like mankind. God has declared in the Glorious Quran:

“There is not an animal on the earth, nor any being that wings its flight, but is a people like unto you...” (Quran 6:38)

The Glorious Quran mentions the aesthetic functions of these creatures as objects of beauty in addition to their other functions. Since peace of mind is a religious requirement which needs to be fully satisfied, those things which cause it should be amply provided and conserved. God has made in plants and animals that which excites wonder and joy in man’s soul so as to satisfy his peace of mind, a factor which is essential for man’s proper functioning and full performance.

The Glorious Quran also mentions other functions which these creatures perform and which man may not perceive, namely the functions of worshipping God, declaring in His praise and bowing down to Him as they are compelled by their very nature to do. God has said,

“Do you not see that to God bow down in worship all things that are in the heavens and on the earth - the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the animals...” (Quran 22:18)

“The seven heavens and the earth and all the beings therein proclaim His glory: There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you understand not how they declare His glory...” (Quran 17:44)

“To God bow all beings in the heavens and the earth - with good will or in spite of themselves...” (Quran 13:15)

Islam emphasizes all measures for the survival and perpetuation of these creatures so that they can fully perform the functions assigned to them. The absolute destruction of any species of animals or plant by man cannot be justified; nor should any be harvested at a rate in excess of its natural regeneration. This applies to hunting and fishing, forestry and wood-cutting for timber and fuel, grazing, and all other utilization of resources. It is imperative that the genetic diversity of living beings be preserved - both for their own sake and for the good of mankind and all other creatures.

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