

THE CREATION OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIENCE (PART 4 OF 4): GOD'S GREEN EARTH

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“With Him are the keys (to the treasures) of the Unseen that no one knows but He. He knows whatever there is on the earth and in the sea. Not a leaf falls but with His knowledge: there is not a grain in the earth’s shadows, not a thing, freshly green or withered, but it is (inscribed) in a clear record.” (Quran 6:59)

The Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, once said:

“The world is green and beautiful, and God has appointed you his guardian over it.”(Saheeh Muslim)

Keeping the earth green, productive and of benefit to man and beast is a most noble concern according to Islam. We learn from the Prophet that:

“There is none amongst the believers who plants a tree, or sows a seed, and then a bird, or a person, or an animal eats from it, except that it is regarded as having given a charitable gift (for which he can expect God’s Pleasure and Reward).” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

The planting of vegetation is such a virtuous endeavour in the Sight of God that it is encouraged even if it be a person’s final act on Earth. The Prophet said:

“Even when the Day of Judgement comes (upon you), if any one has a palm-shoot in hand, he should plant it.” (Ahmad)

As for the question of who has rights over herbage and the other resources that are vital to the survival and well-being of humankind, the Prophet explicitly stated:

“The people are partners in three things: water, herbage and (fuel for) fire.” (ibn Maajah)

It is a given in Islam that if the vital resources of the earth are not shared equitably, societies will be polarized between the haves and the have-nots. Hence, those Muslims who find themselves in control of provisions beyond their means are encouraged to be charitable and compassionate towards the less fortunate one on the one hand, and censured for hoarding and wastefulness on the other. In any event, the obligatory Islamic institution of *zakah* (alms-giving to the poor), the prohibition of *riba* (usury in all its wicked forms), and the ethical economic system of Islam in general, all ensure that the gap between rich and poor does not remain insurmountable or, in any case, is highly porous.

“It is He Who produced gardens with and without trellises; and date-palms and crops with produce of all kinds; and olives and pomegranates of similar and different variety: eat of their fruit in their season but render the dues (i.e. pay the zakah) that are proper on the day that the harvest is gathered. And waste not by excess: for God does not love the wasteful.” (Quran 6:141)

The cause of sustainable development - the ability of current generations to develop without compromising the needs of future generations - is itself in complete harmony with the teachings of Islam. Today, less than 25 percent of the world's population are consuming over 75 percent of the world's resources. It is this misappropriation, misuse, abuse and overuse of the world's resources that makes for unsustainable resource consumption. As for those guilty of such abuse, for them will be a severe comeuppance in the Hereafter, as was alluded to by the Prophet when he said:

“(Among the)... three types of people with whom God, on the Day of Resurrection, will neither exchange words, nor look at ... is the one who possesses an excess of water but withholds it from others. God will say to him: ‘Today I shall withhold from you my grace as you withheld from others the excess of what you had not yourself created.’” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

“And it is He Who has made you successive (generations) in the earth. And He has raised you in ranks, some above others, so that He may try you in that which He has bestowed on you. Surely your Lord is Swift in retribution, and certainly He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (Quran 6:165)

In reality, the accelerated loss of biodiversity, the destruction of natural habitats, the pollution of and damage to eco-systems, and the general environmental erosion, damage and degradation, not to speak of the wide scale oppression suffered by many of the world's inhabitants, are all from the manifest signs of corruption and villainy in the earth.

“If only there had been among the generations before you, persons having wisdom, prohibiting (others) from corruption and villainy in the earth, except a few of those whom We saved from among them.” (Quran 11:116)

If man fails in his duty and responsibility towards the One (God) greater than he, how can he be expected to be dutiful and responsible to that which he deems lesser than himself? If there is ingratitude to the Creator, how can man show gratitude towards his fellow man – let alone for the dumb beasts of the earth? If man cares little for the balance of his good deeds before His Lord, why should he be expected to care for the balance of the world around him?

“Truly, he (the wrong-doer, will have) thought that he would never return (to His lord for reckoning)! By no means! His Lord has been ever watchful over him!” (Quran 84:14-5)

Therefore let all humanity take heed! For it is certainly true that we reap what we sew. Everything we do in life will revisit us after our death; we, the human beings who have had the whole earth and its creatures subdued for a just cause. That fact alone should make us responsible in our preparation for that one fateful day, the Day of Judgement.

“When the Earth is shaken with a violent shaking, and the Earth throws out her burdens, and man says: ‘What has befallen her?’ - on that Day she shall tell her story!” (Quran 99:1-4)

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