

Islam and the Environment

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It has often been observed that Islam cannot ordinarily be described as a religion and that it prescribes a way of life that goes beyond the performance of rituals. The word for religion (dīn) is found in the Qurʾān (anglicized spelling: Koran; this is Islam's sacred text on which much of this essay is based). The word dīn, which appears in 90 different places, often in contexts that place it outside the purely ritual. Dīn in essence describes an integrated code of behavior which deals with personal hygiene, at one end of the spectrum, to our relationships with the natural order at the other. It provides a holistic approach to existence, it does not differentiate between the sacred and the secular and neither does it place a distinction between the world of mankind and the world of nature.

However, this Islamic mode of expression is now severely attenuated, having been swept aside by the forces of history, like the other older traditions, into a domain which treats the natural world exclusively as an exploitable resource. As what we now understand by modernity advanced, as the secular ethic progressively seeped into the Muslim psyche and as industrial development, economic indicators and consumerism became the governing parameters of society, there has been a corresponding erosion of the Muslim perception of the holistic and a withering of its understanding of the sacred nexus between the human community and the rest of the natural order: "The creation of the heavens and the earth is far greater than the creation of mankind. But most of mankind do not know it" (Qurʾān 40:56).

For these and other reasons, Muslims in various parts of the world have in recent times sought the reversal of these trends through the re-establishment of Islamic governance based on the Islamic code known as the Sharīʿah. Deeply embedded in its matrix are detailed and sometimes complex rules, which lay down the basis for Islamic environmental practice. Islamic jurisprudence contains regulations concerning the conservation and allocation of scarce water resources; it has rules for the conservation of land with special zones of graded use; it has special rules for the establishment of rangelands, wetlands, green belts and also wildlife protection and conservation. Much of the traditional institutions and laws associated with sound environmental practice in Islam have now fallen into disuse.

*Although the re-establishment of Islamic governance is an aspiration held by an increasing number of Muslims, there is now a growing movement amongst them, led by thinkers like Seyyed Hossein Nasr (see *Nasr, Seyyed Hossein*, Volume 5), who place an immediate priority in dealing with*

the intractable problems that the human race is creating for itself by overexploiting and degrading the planet beyond repair. Credit is due to Seyyed Hossein Nasr for almost single handedly rekindling the consciousness of not only Muslims, but of adherents of other traditions, to the dimension we have come to describe as faith and nature. His first exposition on this subject was a series of lectures in May 1966, delivered at the invitation of the University of Chicago, which was eventually published (Hossein, 1968). He has written voluminously on this theme since then; see, for example, Hossein, 1996. For Muslims this crisis calls for a fresh evaluation of the teachings of Islam and its practice in the present globalized order.

A GLANCE AT THE BASICS

Islam is the name of the religion discussed in this contribution. A Muslim (called a Musselman in the 18th century) is a follower of Islam. The word Islam literally means submission or surrender, and a Muslim is one who surrenders his will to the will of God. A Muslim country is one in which the majority of people are Muslims – there are about 60 such countries in the world.

The roots of Islamic environmental practice are to be found in the Qurʾān and the guidance (sunnāh) of Prophet Muhammad. Prophet Muhammad is the Prophet of Islam and is usually referred to by Muslims as the Messenger of God (Rasūlullāh). He was born in 570 AD in Mecca and died in 632 in Medina, in what is now Saudi Arabia. Over the centuries, Islamic practice has been elaborated by a succession of scholars and jurists responding to real problems experienced by the growing community of Muslims in various parts of the world.

The Islamic worldview is based on the belief in the existence of an all powerful creator who is the same God (Allāh in Arabic) of the other monotheistic faiths, Judaism and Christianity. Muslims learn from the Qurʾān that God created the universe and every single atom and molecule it contains and that the laws of creation include the elements of order, balance and proportion: "He created everything and determined it most exactly" (25:2) and "It is He Who appointed the sun to give radiance and the moon to give light, assigning it in phases . . . Allāh did not create these things except with truth. We make the signs clear for people who know" (10:5).

What may be described as the Islamic creed has three aspects. The first is the core value system that Islam establishes, which is islām itself and in this context is taken to mean submission. The second is faith (imān) and the third is good personal conduct (ihsān) traditionally described as righteousness or piety.

Islam, in its verb context, is elaborated in what is commonly described as the five pillars. The first of these is a two-part declaration (shahadā) bearing witness that there

is no God but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God; the second is the performance of the five daily prayers (salāt); the third is the annual payment of a specific tax (zakāt); the fourth is to fast during the month of Ramadhan (sawm); the fifth is to make the pilgrimage (hāj) to Mecca at least once in a lifetime for those who have the means to do it.

Imān was described by the Prophet Muhammad as knowing with the heart, voicing with the tongue and expressing with the body. This requires the profession of faith in God, His angels, His books, His messengers, the final day and acceptance that life in all its expressions emanates from the divine source.

Ihsān is described as the act of worshipping Allāh as if you see Him, knowing that even if you do not see Him, He sees you. This goes much beyond the ritual prayers; and every good action performed by a believer is seen as an act of worship. This is commonly expressed by Muslims as doing what is pleasing to Allāh, who is ever present, ever watchful.

Taken as a whole as it is intended to be, caring for planet Earth, our only home, is integrated within the framework of this value system. This is then an everyday concern for the Muslim, which the Qurʾān reminds him by saying, “We have not omitted anything from the Book” (6:39) and “He said ‘Our Lord is He Who gives each thing its created form and then guides it’ ” (20:49). We will now look at how this is reflected in daily life.

THE ETHICAL DIMENSION

One of the stories often told by Muslims concerning the environment is the instruction by Abu Bakr, the first Caliph (Khalif) of Islam to his armies. In addition to telling them not to harm women, children and the infirm, he ordered them not to harm animals, destroy crops or cut down trees. There were two elements present in this decree: the first, to establish justice even as the Muslim armies fought, and the second, to recognize the value of nature. It should also be noted that the environment was not an issue or subject for separate treatment in life as it flowed onwards in both war and peace. The human condition was never separated from the natural order. It was a matter to be reckoned with at every moment of existence like the very air we take into our lungs.

Abu Bakr was the first of four rightly guided caliphs who succeeded the Prophet after his death. They were known as such because of the lengths to which they went to incorporate the instructions in the Qurʾān and the Prophet’s example into their rule. The rule of the rightly guided caliphs lasted from 632 to 661 (AD) and became the time, including the time of the Prophet, which all Muslims to this day seek to emulate. In attempting to reproduce the Prophetic model what the rightly guided

caliphs did was to set a pattern that would evolve into the matrix that formed the basis of the Islamic legal system known as the Sharīah and which very soon came to circumscribe Muslim life. The word Sharīah has an interesting etymology with strong environmental connotations. It means a way or path in Arabic and “its derivation refers to the beaten track by which wild animals come to drink at their watering places. It is the road that leads to where the waters of life flow inexhaustibly” (Eaton, 1994; 180).

As Muslim populations grew and expanded territorially, their requirements in government became increasingly complex and the Sharīah accordingly became more sophisticated. To the Qurʾān and Sunnah were added two other elements: the consensus (ijmā) of scholar jurists and the process of reasoning by analogy (qiyās). Islamic law (fiqh) evolved out of this process and there are two other traditional instruments which were incorporated into this system and which could usefully serve the purpose of formulating environmental law in the Muslim world today. The first of these is interpretation in context (ijtihad) and the second is custom and practice (‘urf wa adāt).

The Sharīah expanded and evolved within this framework to set defining standards for Muslim behavior within the divine decrees of the Qurʾān, including *inter alia* family law, civil law, commercial law and environmental law. From the time of the Prophet, law has taken precedence over theology; this is stated to be the case because Islam’s concern is about humankind and its relationship with the rest of creation, beginning, of course, with itself. The law is about defining these relationships and the following are examples of how the Qurʾān sees it (4:134).

You who have imān (faith); be upholders of justice, bearing witness for Allāh alone, even against yourselves or your parents and relatives. Whether they are rich or poor, Allāh is able to look after them. Do not follow your own desires and deviate from the truth. If you twist and turn away, Allāh is aware of what you do

Truth takes precedence over love, even love for one’s parents, and love is known habitually to conceal the truth. There is no compromise with truth and justice,

so call and go straight as you have been ordered to. Do not follow their whims and desires but say, I have imān (faith), in a book sent down by Allāh and I am ordered to be just between you . . . (42:13)

The Qurʾān also asks us to be just to our natural surroundings, “We did not create the heavens and earth and everything between them, except with truth” (15:85).

Like the Muslims who had succeeded the Prophet and had attempted to give expression to the divine decree, the scholar jurists approached this matter with great diligence and formulated an ethical base derived from the imperatives

laid down in the Qur'ān. These imperatives come under numerous headings but they could be distilled into just three categories for our purposes, bearing in mind that public good (al masalih al mursalah) is the ultimate objective (Doi, 1984). Muslims are to do what is right, forbid what is wrong and act with moderation at all times: "let there be a community among you who call to the good, and enjoin the right and forbid wrong. They are the ones who have success" (3:104). The Qur'ān again uses an environmental theme in exhorting humankind to be moderate; (6:142):

it is He who produces gardens, both cultivated and wild, and palm trees and crops of diverse kinds and olives and pomegranates both similar and dissimilar. Eat of their fruits when they bear fruit and pay their dues on the day of their harvest, and do not be profligate. He does not love the profligate.

The Sharīah also evolved within the guidelines set by three principles agreed upon by scholar jurists over the centuries. They are:

1. the interest of the community takes precedence over the interests of the individual;
2. relieving hardship takes precedence over promoting benefit;
3. a bigger loss cannot be prescribed to alleviate a smaller loss and a bigger benefit takes precedence over a smaller one. Conversely a smaller harm can be prescribed to avoid a bigger harm and a smaller benefit can be dispensed with in preference to a bigger one.

THE NATURAL ORDER IN ISLAM

As the Islamic tapestry unfolded in its expression over the centuries, we discover that there are no references to the environment, as we understand it today. The word *nature*, which is an abstraction, cannot be found in the Qur'ān and the closest modern Arabic usage is the word *bi'a* which connotes a habitat or a surrounding. The word *nature* will continue to be used in this essay for linguistic convenience. For a further explanation on terminology, see Khalid (1999). The Qur'ān speaks of creation (*khalq*) and it contains two hundred and sixty one verses where this word is used in its various grammatical forms derived from the root *kh l q*. These verses contain references to the human world; to the natural world of the Earth, from trees to turtles, from fish to fowl; and to the sun, stars and skies. The very first revelation of the Qur'ān to the Messenger used this word in its verb form to dramatic effect, "Recite in the name of your Lord who created, created man from clots of blood" (96:1). Creation is the fabric into which the tapestry of life is worked.

Creation or nature is referred to as the signs (*āyāt*) of Allāh and this is also the name given to the verses of the Qur'ān. 'Āyāt' means signs, symbols or proof of the divine.

As the Qur'ān is proof of Allāh so likewise is His creation. The Qur'ān also speaks of signs within the self and as Nasr (1993) explains,

... Muslim sages referred to the cosmic or ontological Qur'ān ... they saw upon the face of every creature letters and words from the cosmic Qur'ān ... they remained fully aware of the fact that the Qur'ān refers to phenomena of nature and events within the soul of man as *āyāt* ... for them forms of nature were literally *āyāt* Allāh.

As the Qur'ān says, "there are certainly signs in the earth for people with certainty; and in yourselves. Do you not then see?" (51:20, 21).

Writing from another perspective, Faruqi and Faruqi (1986) say:

Its (nature's) goodness is derived from that of the divine purpose. For the Muslim, nature is *ni'māh*, a blessed gift of Allāh's bounty ... to transform in any way with the aim of achieving ethical value ... Since nature is Allāh's work, His *āyāt* or signs, and the instrument of His purpose which is absolute good, nature enjoys in the Muslim's eye a tremendous dignity.

The Qur'ān says about these matters (16:65–69):

Allah sends down water from the sky and by it brings the dead earth back to life. **There is certainly a Sign in that for people who hear.** There is instruction for you in cattle. From the contents of their bellies, from between dung and blood, We give you pure milk to drink, easy for drinkers to swallow. And from the fruit of the date palm and the grapevine you derive both intoxicants and wholesome provision. **There is certainly a Sign in that for people who use their intellect.** Your Lord revealed to the bees: 'Build dwellings in the mountains and the trees, and also in the structures which men erect. Then eat from every kind of fruit and travel the paths of your Lord, which have been made easy for you to follow'. From inside them comes a drink of varying colours, containing healing for mankind. **There is certainly a Sign in that for people who reflect.**

The universe we inhabit is a sign of God's creation as is the environment of our innermost selves. They both emanate from the One Source and are bonded by only one purpose, which is to serve the divine will. This bonding of the cosmic to the subatomic is the deep ecology of Islam but it is not a relationship of equals as we can see in the hierarchy of the food chain dominated by Man. Whilst the primary relationship is that between the Creator and the rest of His creation, the Creator Himself determined a subsidiary one, that between Man and the rest of His creation which the Qur'ān defines as follows: "It is He Who created everything on the earth for you ..." (2:28); "We did not create heaven and earth and everything between them as a game ..." (21:16); "We did not create heaven and earth and everything between them to no purpose" (38:26); "... He wanted to test you regarding what has come to you ..." (5:48).

The Qur'ānic view holds that everything on the earth was created for humankind. It was God's gift (ni'mah) to us, but a gift with conditions nevertheless and it is decidedly not something that one runs and plays with. The earth then is a testing ground of the human species. The tests are a measure of our acts of worship (ihsan) in its broadest sense. That is living in a way that is pleasing to Allāh, striving in everything we do to maintain the harmony of our inner and outer environments.

As our interaction with the environment evolved, it manifested itself in a range of rules and institutions. As the Muslim community expanded out of its sparse desert environment, it was confronted by many challenges, one of which was relative abundance. This brought about other problems like over exploitation and waste. Muslims applied themselves to these problems assiduously and it would be salutary to look at this legacy. For more information on this subject see Bagader *et al.* (1994); Llewellyn (1992); Dien (2000). The following is a brief summary of how the Shari'ah developed in this area over the past 1400 years.

Legislative Principles

1. Allāh is the sole owner of the earth and everything in it. People hold land on usufruct – that is, for its utility value only. There is a restricted right to public property.
2. Abuse of rights is prohibited and penalized.
3. There are rights to the benefits derived from natural resources held in common.
4. Scarce resource utilization is controlled.
5. The common welfare is protected.
6. Benefits are protected and detriments are either reduced or eliminated.

Institutions

1. People who reclaim or revive land (ihyā' al māwāt) have a right to its ownership.
2. Land grants (iqṭā') may be made by the state for reclamation and development.
3. Land may be leased (ijārā) for its usufruct by the state for its reclamation and development.
4. Special reserves (hīmā) may be established by the state for use as conservation zones.
5. The state may establish inviolable zones (al-harīm) where use is prohibited or restricted. Every settlement has a right to create such zones managed by the people and where use is severely restricted. Additionally, it is permitted to establish these zones adjacent to sources of water and other utilities like roads and places of public resort.
6. Makkāh and Madīnah are known as the two inviolable sanctuaries (al-haramain) where trees cannot be cut down and animals are protected from harm within their boundaries. They serve as examples of best practice.

7. Charitable endowments (awqāf) may be established with specific conservation objectives.

Enforcement

The primary duty of the Islamic state is to promote the good and forbid wrong doing. As part of these functions, it has the mandate to protect land and natural resources from abuse and misuse. From its earliest years the Islamic state established an agency known as the hisbā whose specific task was to protect the people through promoting the establishment of good and forbidding wrong-doing. This agency was headed by a learned jurist (muhtasib) who functioned like a chief inspector of weights and measures and chief public health officer rolled into one. He was also responsible, among other similar duties, for the proper functioning of the hīmā and al harīm zones and he acted as what one might describe as an environmental inspectorate.

The development and application of these principles and institutions have seen a decline over the past two centuries, as another worldview based on the exploitation of natural resources for profit gradually overtook this model. We are experiencing the consequences of this now. However, there are clear indications as to how this Islamic heritage has been and could again be put to good use in the modern context.

AN EMERGING RESPONSE

The Muslim world was gradually co-opted into the new world order by force of arms and by force of economics. The first is history and the second present day reality and what the Muslims lost in between these twin processes was the sap of Islam and their unique way of perceiving the universe. For Muslims, their *dīn* is a whole, an organic reality, where every element has a function as a part of this whole. For example, Islam law does not make sense without the ethical dimension of the divine revelation. Law in the West is amoral. It deals with human ends for human purposes. The Muslim idea of the highest form of civilization is that it is the one that is pleasing to Allah. In today's Western-dominated global order of which Muslims are a part, conspicuous consumption has become the highest imperative. Muslim nation states of which there are now about 60, are willing co-optees to this consumer ethic.

These are however, superficial considerations; and deep in the interface between Islam and the West are two irreconcilable factors that call for some examination. The first is the matter of existence itself and how it is to be defined and the second is the matter concerning money and how it is to be used.

The traditional worldview, which includes that of the West, was challenged by what we have come to know

as the Enlightenment (*see Enlightenment Project*, Volume 5), having its origins in 16th century Europe. These events are usually seen as a time in which science began its ascendancy over religion. Tarnas (1996) observes that this movement achieved its maturity in the 19th century, finally resulting in a radical shift of psychological alliance from the divine to humankind. Descartes (the French philosopher, mathematician) finally breached the floodgates of the old order by splitting mind from body and proclaiming a dualistic worldview in his well known statement “I think, therefore I am” (*cogito ergo sum*). One result of the Enlightenment was science, including the scientific capacity for rendering intelligible certain aspects of the material world and for making mankind (in Descartes’s own words) “Master and possessor of Nature”.

This view is on a collision course with how Islam teaches the Muslim to view the world. There is only one master and possessor of nature and that is the One Who created it, Allāh. This is unequivocally expressed in the very first line of the Qur’ān “Praise be to Allāh, the Lord of all the worlds” (1:1) and the last verse in the Qur’ān “Say: ‘I seek refuge with the Lord of mankind, the King of mankind, the God of mankind’” (114:1–3) and repeatedly in between. After Descartes, Isaac Newton’s “world view led to the well known mechanistic conception of the universe and totally away from the holistic and organic interpretation of things. The result was after the 17th century science and religion became totally divorced” (Nasr, 1990).

People would find it impossible to live in today’s world without money, but one increasingly comes across interesting appraisals of it like the following for example: “. . . in spite of all its fervid activity, money remains a naked symbol with no intrinsic value of its own and no direct linkage to anything specific” (Kurtzman, 1993). Money has come to be recognized as mere tokens and:

there is something quite magical about the way money is created. No other commodity works quite the same way. The money supply grows through use; it expands through debt. The more we lend, the more we have. The more debt there is, the more there is.

(Kurtzman, 1993)

These tokens of value that we create from nothing and use everyday grow exponentially ad infinitum. But we know that the natural world, which is subject to drastic resource depletion, has limits and is finite. This equation is lopsided and the question is for how long can we continue to create this infinite amount of token finance to exploit the real and tangible resources of a finite world. Looked at from this perspective, money, as the modern world has contrived it, assumes the characteristics of a virus that eats into the fabric of the planet. The consequences of this become visible as global environmental degradation.

This magical system underwent a metamorphosis in 1971 when President Nixon of the US unilaterally abandoned

the gold standard. This is not the place to go into the background of this event, suffice it to say that, “by abandoning the gold standard . . . he also moved the world into a new standard: the interest standard”. (Kurtzman, 1993). It is generally known that Islam prohibits usury or the taking of interest and the term used in the Qur’ān for this is *riba*. (For an appraisal on interest see Diwaney, 1997) This term has wide connotations and simply put, it means one cannot have something out of nothing. Thus, *riba* is also seen as prohibiting the free creation of credit. The Qur’ān denounces these practices vehemently and we can see why from the foregoing discussion: “those who practise *riba* will not rise from the grave except as someone driven mad by shaytan’s (satan’s) touch” (2:274); also, “you who have *imān* (faith)! have *taqwā* (awe) of Allah and forgo any remaining *riba* if you are *muminūn* (believers). If you do not, know that it means war from Allāh and his Messenger” (2:277, 278). No other proclamation in the Qur’ān matches this degree of trenchancy.

The Muslim world today is comprised of nation states (not an Islamic concept) that are wholly or mostly Muslim and Muslim minorities, from the very large to the very small, living in non-Muslim countries. Muslim countries may be divided into two categories. The first, into those that describe themselves as Islamic states but who will freely admit that the way they run their affairs is a far cry from the example laid down by the Prophet, the Right Guided Caliphs and the paradigm of the Qur’ān. The second group consists of secular Muslim states where Islam plays a ritualistic role in varying degrees of intensity. However, both these groups, as willing or unwilling co-optees to the new world order, resort to the methods and institutions that are part of it, in order to trade for instance. One such institution is the banking system, and every Muslim state, Islamic or secular has banks with or without the approval of the scholar jurists who did much to build the *Sharī’ah* over the centuries into a potent force for just government.

It should be obvious from this that it becomes almost impossible for Muslims whether individuals or nation states, to give expression to a normative Islam under the present globalized system. A system that is in direct conflict with two fundamentals that are part of the Islamic worldview. There now prevails a schizoid tendency in Muslim society whereby it strives to maintain its deep attachment to Islam while it persists in tasting the fruits of the current order.

However, people are increasingly taking a serious look at the current model of endless growth that supplies a contrived demand for consumer goods, which appears to be insatiable and which is, in the end, impacting on the biosphere with drastic consequences. This concern is reflected in the West by the growth of activism and protest organizations. These same trends (differently expressed) appear in the Muslim world. The form this usually takes is the

demand for the establishment of the just order under the Sharī'ah to replace the socialist and capitalist models, which are now seen as failures. It is difficult to see where these demands for change will take Muslims but it is increasingly felt that the current order is untenable in terms of keeping the planet in good repair.

Muslim minorities, particularly those living in the West, have an important role to play. Living in the belly of the beast gives them the advantage of perspective and their understanding of events could lead to a unique contribution to the melting pot of ideas that could lead us out of this impasse. For example, Muslim groups in the West are re-examining alternative currencies and ways of trading that are based on the fiqh of Islam and not on falsehood (Douthwaite, 1996). "Corruption has appeared in both land and sea because of what people's own hands have brought about so that they may taste something of what they have done, so that hopefully they will turn back" (30:40). In other words learn from your mistakes.

One could say with a reasonable degree of certainty that the environmental problems we see today would not have happened in a society ordered in accord with Islamic principles because its world view "defined limits to human behaviour and contained excess" (Khalid, 2000). We have seen how this was done in the realm of environmental protection although its stated aim was not precisely that. Rather it came about in the course of establishing public good, one of the basic principles of the Sharī'ah. Safeguarding against human excess had the effect of protecting the natural world.

The Sharī'ah evolved holistically and new situations were dealt with through the processes we have discussed above. However, there is nothing to stop this from continuing. However there are important impediments to its proper application today:

1. The Sharī'ah is no longer supreme even in Islamic states because of the dominance of the global system now in place. The influence of international trade and finance is a case in point.
2. The Hisbah which was once the environmental enforcement agency is now virtually non-existent.
3. Increasingly civil administration is separating itself from the body of the people who are coming to be known as the religious authorities, i.e., a clergy, which is not recognized in Islam. This is the case in the Sunni tradition of Islam, which accounts for about 85% of the world's Muslim population. The Shia tradition has an established clergy. The concept of *dīn* is wearing thin and as a consequence the holistic approach suffers.
4. Following the Western model, Muslim states increasingly function in watertight compartments. As a mirror of what is happening in the West, Muslim economists and environmentalists are two separate species with opposing perspectives.

5. The nation state model, which all Muslim countries have adopted, has economic development as its highest priority. Coping with environmental change is much lower on the scale.

The following is a crystallization of what we consider to be the essentials which will bring into focus the dimensions of change that are needed today from an Islamic perspective. These ideas have been developed by us over the past decade and discussed at various international forums. However, we are at a disadvantage because the principles we are discussing have been plucked out of the Islamic tapestry so assiduously woven over the past 14 centuries. They work best as part of the whole, but how they fit together in today's context and how the whole can be improved, applied and made sense of are matters for open discussion.

The planetary system, the earth and its ecosystems, all work within their own limits and tolerances. Islamic teaching likewise sets limits to human behavior as a control against excess and it could be said that the limits to the human condition are set within four principles. They are the unity principle (Tawhīd); the creation principle (Fitra); the balance principle (Mizān); and the responsibility principle (Khalīfa).

The Unity Principle

Tawhīd is the foundation of Islamic monotheism and its essence is contained in the declaration (Shahadā) which every Muslim makes and is a constant reminder of faith. It is "there is no God but God" (lā ilāha illa-llāh) and is the foundational statement of the Unity of the Creator from which everything else flows. The second half of this declaration is "Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah" (Muhammadur Rasulullah). "He is Allah, Absolute oneness, Allah the Everlasting Sustainer of all" (112:1, 2). It is the testimony to the unity of all creation and to the fabric of the natural order of which humankind is an intrinsic part: "what is in the heavens and the earth belong to Allah. Allah encompasses everything" (4:125). This is the bedrock of the holistic approach in Islam as this affirms the interconnectedness of the natural order.

The Creation Principle

The Fitra principle describes the primordial nature of creation: "Allah's natural pattern on which He made mankind" (30:29). Mankind was created within the natural pattern of nature and being of it, its role is defined by this patterning itself. For a discussion on Fitra, see Yasien Mohammed (1996). Fitra is the pure state, a state of intrinsic goodness and points to the possibility that everything in creation has a potential for goodness and the conscious expression of this rests with humankind.

The Balance Principle

In one of its more popular passages, the Qur'ān describes creation thus (55:1–5):

The All-Merciful taught the Qur'ān, He created man and taught him clear expression. The sun and moon both run with precision. The stars and the trees all bow down in prostration. He erected heaven and established the balance

Allāh has singled out humankind and taught it clear expression – the capacity to reason. All creation has an order and a purpose and is in a state of dynamic balance. If the sun, the moon, the stars did not bow themselves, i.e., serve the purpose of their design, it would be impossible for life to function on earth. This is another way of saying that the natural order works because it is in submission to the Creator. It is Muslim in the original, primordial sense.

The Responsibility Principle

This principle establishes the tripartite relationship between the Creator, humankind and creation. God created everything for humankind and appointed it the vice-regent (Khalif) on this earth: “it is He Who appointed you Khalifs on this earth” (6:167). This role was one of trusteeship (amānāh) which imposed a moral responsibility, “We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth and the mountains but they refused to take it on and shrank from it. But man took it on.” (33:72). This assumption of responsibility made humankind accountable for their actions, “Will the reward for doing good be anything but good?” (55:59).

We can deduce in outline from these four principles that creation that is both complex and finite is yet exact. It emerged from one source and was designed to function as a whole. Humankind, like the rest of the natural world, was, as part of the natural patterning of creation, in a state of goodness with potential for good actions. It is inextricably part of this pattern, but is the only element of it with choice, that can choose to act against the divine Will using the very gift of reasoning bestowed upon it by the Creator. Submission to the divine will, the natural law that holds in check the instincts of the predator, is the way to uphold our responsibilities as the Creator's Khalif. Humankind are the guardians of the natural order.

CONCLUSION

The position set out in this essay is that of Islam and as we have observed earlier, there is a clear issue of conflicting paradigms. The question is how to implement the teachings and practices of one worldview into an institutional framework devised by another that has a diametrically opposite

outlook. Although it may be possible to incorporate the principles of Islamic environmental law into the legislative programs of Muslim countries, the problem will remain one of implementation unless appropriate institutional arrangements are made to replace the old and now virtually defunct ones. It is also interesting that efforts to meet the challenge of environmental change in Muslim countries are made by secular agencies; this is only to be expected, as this is generally not seen as a Muslim problem. The role of the Muslim scholar jurists has been redefined into a religious one as the nature of the Muslim state has changed in its attempt to cope with modernity. The Muslim scholar jurists were unwilling partners to this change and were replaced by a secularized administration, which gradually weakened the scholar jurists' influence as it began to take charge. However, there is an awakening amongst Muslims to the realities of environmental change and therein lies a paradox. There is just an off chance that this may lead Muslims to the discovery that they may be on the wrong side of the tracks.

Note

The translation of the Qur'ān used is that by Bewley and Bewley (1999). In subsequent references to the Qur'ān in this essay, a quotation is followed by the chapter and verse numbers in parentheses. The actual names of the chapters have been left out for convenience.

Transliteration of Arabic vowels

a pronounced as *a* in cattle, *ā* pronounced as *a* in father, *i* pronounced as *i* as in fin, *ī* pronounced as *ee* as in sheep, *u* pronounced as *oo* in foot, *ū* pronounced as *oo* in soon.

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