

ecoIslam

"...Uphold justice
...even against your-
selves or your parents
and relatives. Whether
they are rich or poor..."

(Qur'an 4:135)



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"The creation of the heavens and the earth is far greater than the creation of humankind. But most of humankind do not know it." (Qur'an 40:57)

The heavy burden of waste

What we consume is defined by what we can afford. The richer the society, the more it can consume - and the more it can afford to waste. But there is another price that we all have to pay, regardless of income or wealth. The burden of waste is a heavy one, not just on the earth but on our own conscience. Islam encourages moderation and forbids excess. We will be accountable for every drop of water we spill, whether we have access to only a cupful or an entire ocean.

Avoiding waste

As the earth is increasingly polluted by toxic landfill sites overflowing with refuse, it is time to rethink our throw-away culture. Muslims, as people of the 'middle way,' need to re-establish balance in our lives in order to avoid an environmental catastrophe in this world and the burden of accountability in the next.

Being moderate

Being moderate in all things means having self-discipline even when circumstances allow indulgence. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his companions lived frugally even in times of prosperity. It is said that when the prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him) was asked why he had never eaten his fill despite his wealth he replied, "I fear that if my belly becomes full I might forget the hungry ones."

Voluntary excess

According to Ali ibn Abu Talib (may Allah be pleased with him), the last of the rightly guided caliphs and the cousin of the Prophet (peace be upon him), the extravagant is someone who has three qualities, "...he eats more than required, wears more than is suitable for him and buys things needlessly." But whilst excess is forbidden in Islam, fulfilling ones needs is encouraged. The key to avoiding excess is knowing the difference.

See overleaf for tips on reducing waste...

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Waste Focus

...continued

Finish your food

In some parts of the world around a third of all purchased food goes to waste, and as it rots it releases methane, the worst form of greenhouse gas. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Eat, drink and clothe yourselves without extravagance or arrogance." He also advised us to eat everything on our plates in order to gain the full blessing, and this sentiment was shared in many other cultures. In the UK for example, there was a strong tradition of cooking with leftovers and many recipes were designed to serve this purpose. Instead of now binning our half-eaten platefuls we would do well to revive this tradition.

Save your water

The clearest Islamic prohibition of waste is in the use of water. Early Muslims, coming from a desert land, understood the need for water conservation. When the Prophet (peace be upon him), saw one of his companions performing *wudhu* (ablution for prayer) he told him not to waste water, "...even if you are by a flowing river!"

Water is globally becoming an increasingly limited resource. If wasting it is not permitted for acts of devotion to God then there is no excuse for leaving the tap running while brushing our teeth! We should also be practicing water-saving techniques such as collecting rainwater to use in our gardens, having quick showers instead of baths and using a low-flush toilet.

Shagufta Yaqub

How to cut down on waste

Reduce: Consume only what is necessary

Recycle: Paper, glass, plastics... and compost fruit and veg

Revive: Fix rather than replace - patching or mending clothes is a *sunnah* (example of the Prophet, peace be upon him)

Re-use: Some things can be given a new use, perhaps as a quirky plantpot, a storage box, a dusting cloth...

Re-home: See if someone else can use it. Join your local Freecycle group, swap clothes with friends, donate to charity shops.



What a waste not to recycle

Every year we throw away billions of tonnes of waste, but not all of it is rubbish. A third of household dustbins are full of paper and card which can easily be recycled, not to mention glass, aluminium and plastic. Of the four billion or so tonnes of rubbish we produce globally every year, only a fraction of it is recycled. The rest goes into landfill sites or is burnt in an incinerator, which is not only a terrible waste of finite resources but devastating for the environment.

The most wasteful societies in the world are the richest, with the USA alone contributing to a third of the world's solid waste. Consumerist lifestyles means we succumb to advertising and buy more, which means more has to be produced and inevitably more is thrown out. By recycling we can save finite raw materials and a lot of the energy that goes into making things.

Some of the most easily recycled materials are the ones we use and discard the most - glass bottles and jars, tin cans, paper and plastic. By putting these items into recycling rather than ordinary bins we can save a great deal. It takes 15 trees to make just one tonne of paper. Every tonne of glass we recycle saves 130 litres of oil. Recycling aluminium uses 96% less energy than the usual manufacturing process. The benefits, like the recycling process, go on and on.

Those of us who have gardens have little excuse not to recycle much of our kitchen and garden waste. When dumped in a landfill site organic waste starts to rot away producing carbon dioxide and methane, the greenhouse gases that drive climate change. Instead if we put our peelings and cuttings in a compost bin they eventually become good quality compost that we can use in the garden.

In much of the developed world there are now local schemes to help people recycle. It is something we can all do for the environment which takes a little effort and gives a whole lot of satisfaction. In fact, it would be a total waste not to.

*Chris Philpott has been a green activist for 25 years and is author of "Rediscovering Green Spirituality," to be published this year.
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Waste Not Want Not

Editorial

It's lunchtime and a city worker buys a can of fizzy drink from the supermarket. In another part of the world a child picks a mango from a tree in his village.

The fizzy drink is consumed in a few minutes and the aluminium can is tossed into the bin. It leaves behind a trail of pollution and the carbon footprints of all the players in its chain of production. Then there's the can itself, which if dumped in a landfill site will interact with other toxic materials and release a hazardous chemical cocktail into the ground and air. Now consider the child eating a mango in its natural environment. The fruit is consumed and the seed and skin is discarded. Another tree may grow from the seed, giving even more fruit. The skin will compost in a matter of weeks enriching the soil. The whole act is natural, organic; no food miles, no recycling and above all, no waste.

As urban populations continue to grow at the expense of rural communities, this kind of natural consumption will become a minority activity. More than half the world's population now live in cities and economists in developing countries somehow see this as a good thing. We too enjoy mangoes but ours are individually wrapped, rejected for being the wrong shape or size, transported across thousands of miles... in short, they involve more packaging, more waste, more recycling and more greenhouse gases.

This is the conundrum we face and there are two parallel movements attempting to solve it. The first is to grow as much of our own food as possible. For those who have gardens this could be a healthy, enjoyable and challenging experiment. The other is to be selective when buying at the supermarket and force change through consumer demand. Organic food is popular but consumers are not so discerning about where the product comes from. The further away the exporting country the greater the carbon imprint of what one is consuming. Associated with this is the trend of buying locally produced foods, either through the supermarket or better still, directly through farmers markets.

Food and water are both big on the waste agenda and the worst offenders are city dwellers from the 'developed' world. In the USA nearly half of all edible food is wasted - that's around \$43 billion worth of dumped food, a disgrace considering the millions that go without one square meal a day.

The conservers of water are also the poor, those who have to trudge long distances for their water do not know what it means to leave the tap running.

Muslims are clearly instructed in the Qur'an not to waste:

".... But waste not by excess for Allah does not love the wasters."
(Qur'an: Al An'am (6), 141).

If we kept this in mind whenever we performed *wudhu* (ritual ablution) perhaps our daily water consumption would be significantly reduced. It is a small step but perhaps a good starting point in our commitment to keep to the spirit of our faith and reduce our overall waste. After all, if the Prophet (peace be upon him) managed to do his *wudhu* with a handful of water then why cannot we?

Fazlun Khalid,
Founder-Director of IFEES



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Sacred Gifts of Saudi Arabia

Conservation

Saudi Arabia is not the first place that comes to mind when you think of juniper woodlands, mangroves, marine islands and coral reefs. But this vast land contains these and many other habitats that are home to thousands of plants and animals, some of which are found nowhere else on Earth. One outstanding site is Jabal Aja', a unique mountain massif that needs to be protected if its endangered species are to survive.

The diversity of life

The beauty and diversity of life in Saudi Arabia is little known: the Arabian oryx, Nubian ibex, spiny-tailed dhabb lizards, demoiselle cranes the colour of thunderclouds, little green bee-eaters and sunbirds so iridescent they bring tears to the eyes. Amongst the varied flora are acacias, lote trees, sweetrush and fountaingrass, aloes, myrrh and dragon trees, date palms and maidenhair ferns at springs, graceful moringa trees and caper shrubs with round leaves like spangles of azure sky. In the Red Sea and Arabian Gulf live dolphins, dugongs, sea turtles, zebra sharks, manta rays, jewelfish, wrasses, butterfly fishes, corals and cowries.

The splendour of Jabal Aja'

Jabal Aja' is a maze of granite pinnacles and exfoliation domes that harbours the greatest concentration of biological diversity in the arid interior of the Arabian Peninsula. Covering 2,200 square kilometres, it contains more than 500 plant and vertebrate animal species, some of which are relicts that have disappeared from the surrounding region. Its habitats include oases of date palms and acacias, springs, seeps, and rock pools, and its rugged terrain is largely inaccessible. It has been identified as an Important Bird Area and an Important Plant Area; it is a strategic natural seedbank, and its protection should help to alleviate the effects of desertification and climate change.

Protecting a sacred gift

Saudi Arabia's National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD) is charged with conserving the country's biological diversity. With the assistance of IFEES, the NCWCD proposed Jabal Aja' as Saudi Arabia's contribution to the WWF / ARC programme, "Sacred Gifts for a Living Planet." The idea was embraced by HRH Saud Bin Abdulmohsen bin Abdulaziz, the Governor of the Ha'il Region. Jabal Aja' is featured on the list of Sacred Gifts and Prince Saud received an award from WWF / ARC for its conservation. However, Jabal Aja' has yet to be proclaimed a protected area due to a lack of funds.



Jabal Aja'



Hikers on Jabal Aja'

A model of Islamic heritage

In the Islamic heritage a protected area is known as a 'hima'. The idea behind this Sacred Gift is that Jabal Aja' will become an embodiment of the hima concept, combining the best in contemporary protected area management with traditional conservation practices.

It is also proposed that Jabal Aja' become the country's first Biosphere Reserve, a protected area designed to integrate the conservation of biological diversity with the sustainable use of natural resources. This involves working with local communities to establish different management zones. One of the main uses of this site is to be for environmental education. We hope Jabal Aja' will be a model conservation area not only for Saudi Arabia but for the wider Islamic world.

Othman Llewellyn
othman@ncwcd.gov.sa





Demoiselle Crane



Sand Fox

Male Ibex (below)



Sanctuaries for all life

In Saudi Arabia are the two sacred areas of Islam - the '*harams*' of Makkah and Al-Madinah, defined in Islamic law as sanctuaries for human beings, wildlife, and native vegetation. Within their boundaries the injury, or even disturbance, of wildlife is forbidden. When the people of Makkah entered into Islam, the prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) proclaimed:

"It [Makkah] is sacred by virtue of the sanctity conferred on it by God until the Day of Resurrection. Its thorn trees shall not be cut down, its game shall not be disturbed...and its fresh herbage shall not be cut."

He established a similar sanctuary surrounding Al-Madinah, saying:

"Verily Abraham declared Makkah a sanctuary and I declare Al-Madinah, that which lies between its two lava flows, to be a sanctuary; its trees shall not be cut and its game shall not be hunted."

The *haram* of Makkah includes a city of more than a million people as well as its surrounding valleys, plains, sand dunes and mountain peaks. Gazelles and ibex occurred there until recent times. Wolf, hyena, wildcat and other mammals are still to be found, as well as birds, reptiles, and invertebrates. The smaller *haram* of Al-Madinah is now almost entirely urbanised, but it still contains some groves of date palms, which are habitat for an array of resident and migratory birds.

We cannot avoid injuring wild plants and animals unless we protect their habitats. All planning, design, and construction within the sacred precincts should therefore be carried out with extraordinary sensitivity and care. If the commandments of the Prophet (peace be upon him) were implemented fully, the two *harams* would become models of environmental protection, sustainable development and integrated urban and rural planning.

These two sites are visited each year by millions of pilgrims. By demonstrating the highest standards of environmental excellence, as expressions of harmony and human stewardship (*khilafah*), they have the potential to spread environmental consciousness throughout the Muslim world. Conversely, if these most sacred sites on the face of the earth are degraded and abused, the message will be spread throughout the Muslim countries that to despoil the rest of the planet is not wrong.

Othman Llewellyn

Llewellyn of Arabia

Eco-personality



Othman Llewellyn is a conservationist working in Saudi Arabia. For him, protecting wildlife is a religious duty. The holy cities of Makkah and Al-Madinah are sanctuaries not just for humans but for all life. Life is rare and tenuous in the desert, he tells Ecolslam, and so it is especially precious.

What first attracted you to conservation work?

It was my good fortune to be born into a family of conservationists. I was raised backpacking, horsepacking, boating, and camping in western North America, and I always knew that my career would be in conservation. I studied environmental planning and landscape architecture at university and then moved to Arabia, where I now work in the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD).

What does your work involve?

I work as a protected area planner. We protect areas mainly to conserve their biological diversity. We assess the different kinds of biotopes in a country or a region in order to represent them as well as possible, and survey the places of greatest biological diversity, as well as the viable populations of key plant and animal species. We then weigh and prioritize the sites that we have surveyed, so as to conserve the greatest diversity of life we can in a system of protected areas. Finally we prepare a management plan for each site. This requires working with local communities and government agencies to agree on a plan that takes everyone's interests into account.

What attracted you to work in Saudi Arabia?

When I came to know the amazing plants and animals of the deserts, mountains and the seas here I fell in love with them and with the sculpted landforms in which they live: the rounded domes and spires of granite, layered mazes of sandstone, hardened floods of lava rock, and soft, sensuous dunes of sand. I know of no land more beautiful than Arabia. The beauty of the desert is the beauty of rarity. Rarity in time, for you never know for sure when it will rain; rarity in space, for in the vast rocklands you may come on a little green oasis, and the contrast makes it seem more verdant than the forests of temperate climes. Life is rare and tenuous in the desert, so it is especially precious.

What advantages do you see in adopting an Islamic approach to environmental issues?

Most traditional conservation practices in Muslim countries are grounded in the *shari'ah*, the Law and ethic of Islam. For Muslim communities there is a huge difference between protecting something because the government tells us to, and protecting it because it is our duty to the Lord of all beings. Unfortunately, however, traditional conservation practices are not officially recognised in most Muslim countries and Islamic legislation is seldom applied effectively or creatively for conservation. The contributions that Islamic law and ethics have to offer remain largely unrealized.

Looking back over your distinguished career, which achievement are you most pleased with?

The work in which I am involved is far from finished. I hope that before I die we will have established environmental *fiqh* as a recognised discipline of Islamic law. I hope that we will have devised a protected area system in Arabia that will safeguard the biological diversity and beauty of that land. I hope also that we can conserve something of the wider Islamic world as well - from the steppes and peaks of Turkistan to the African sahel and savanna, and the rainforests, mountains and islands of Southeast Asia. If I can help to rescue something of the glorious diversity of life that is disappearing from these lands, then that would be something to be pleased with.

What makes you feel optimistic about the future of humankind on earth?

I don't always feel optimistic about our future on Earth! When I see how utterly selfish and short-sighted we human beings are and the rate at which we are extinguishing the diversity of life and desecrating the earth, it is hard to feel positive. As described in the Qur'an, we have proven tyrants and fools. On the other hand, environmental consciousness, legislation, and science are advancing. We have a convention on biological diversity, treaties to conserve migratory species, to regulate trade in endangered species, and soon, I hope, we will have an agreement to reduce global warming. We may manage to stabilize our numbers and correct our headlong rush to destruction before we bring about some cataclysm. But how much of the diversity of life on Earth will we have obliterated in the meantime? How much will remain of unspoiled nature? What treasures will be lost forever?

If you could suggest one action that would help protect the environment, what would it be?

It is not one action that I would urge, but an ethic that would give rise to many actions - the ethic of *khilafah* (stewardship). We are told in the Qur'an that God has made us stewards on the earth so that He might try us in that which He has bestowed upon us (Qur'an 6:165; 10:14). Human beings have been given enormous ability to do both good and harm; with ability comes responsibility. As the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, declared, with each day's dawning one rises to bargain with one's soul as a stake, and either ransoms it or ruins it. Whatever we do, we will not leave this world unchanged. We must take heed, then, to leave it for the better.

Interviewed by Samina Faiz

News and Events

Global Roundup

Science and faith unite on global warming

They may not always see eye to eye but scientists and theologians have issued a joint declaration voicing their concerns over global warming. The statement is the result of a workshop at the University of Oxford which brought together prominent members of religious and scientific communities.

Amongst the signatories is Fazlun Khalid of IFEES and many others with years of expertise in environmental issues. Setting their differences aside the signatories recognised the need to halt the damage that human activities are doing to the natural world.

The declaration states, "Within the lifetimes of many of today's young people, there will be critical shortages of food and water, exhaustion of some vital resources, increasing pollution of land, sea and air, and further destabilization of climate, all with dangerous consequences for society. ...Humans must find a way to live more lightly on the Earth and do more to protect biodiversity of the lands and seas. ...The time left for us to change direction is very short."*

A similar alliance has also been formed in the USA in the hope of changing popular perceptions about environmental issues.

**A full version of the statement and its signatories is available at:*

<http://www.martininstitute.ox.ac.uk>

A Botanic Garden in the Middle East

Jordan is to start work on creating the country's first botanic garden thanks to support from HSBC Bank and Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI). The plans were announced by HRH Princess Basma of Jordan on the occasion of the BGCI's 20th anniversary in November last year.

Princess Basma is involved extensively in grassroots work for the environment and is passionate about preserving Jordan's botanical heritage for future generations. The garden will be the first of its kind open to the public and will also serve as a base for scientific research, conservation and raising public awareness about environmental issues.

IFEES founder amongst top 15 green religious leaders

Alongside the Pope, Archbishop of Canterbury and the Dalai Lama, Fazlun Khalid, Founder-Director of IFEES was voted one of the top 15 green religious leaders in the world. The shortlist was compiled as part of the Live Earth initiative to stop climate change, which also held a number of publicity concerts for the cause in July last year. Fazlun Khalid, now widely recognised as the foremost expert on ecology from an Islamic perspective said, "Human beings have a basic right to the benefits of a healthy planet. Protecting the environment is a form of worship for us."



More information at: <http://liveearth.msn.com>

Environmental Fatwas in Indonesia

One of the most powerful groups of Islamic scholars in Indonesia has passed a fatwa (Islamic legal ruling) on the "Preservation of the Forests and the Environment." The National Forestry and Environment Body of the General Council of Nahdatul Ulama issued the fatwa in July 2007, just weeks after a Colloquium on Islamic Environmental Law in Jakarta, organised by IFEES in collaboration with the Ministry of the Environment in Indonesia.

The fatwa represents a breakthrough for the work carried out by IFEES around the world. The colloquium itself brought together Islamic scholars from Saudi Arabia, Kenya and India who conferred with their Indonesian counterparts to determine how Islamic jurisprudence on the environment could be codified and popularised in the Muslim world.

Fazlun Khalid, the convenor of the colloquium said that this pioneering fatwa shows that Islamic teachings have the power to change things for the better. He urged Muslim scholars across the world to emulate the Indonesian scholars and show that Muslims, through Islamic teaching, have the capacity to make life better for the entire human race.

More on the fatwa in the next issue of Ecolslam

News and Events

Views and Reviews

A Crude Awakening - The Oil Crash

Directed by Basil Gelpke and Ray McCormack

This film is an eco-documentary looking at the phenomenon of 'Peak Oil' - the point when non-renewable fossil fuel production starts to decline.

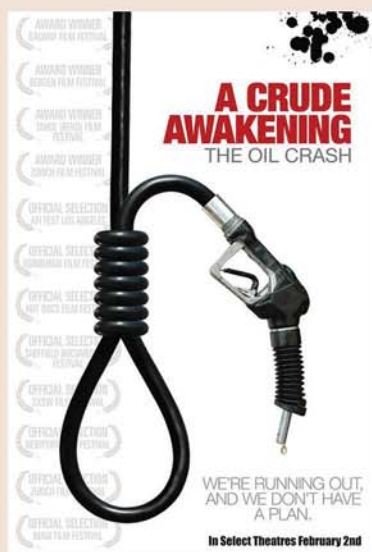
The 90-minute film tells the story of our civilisation's addiction to oil and its collision course with geological realities. Global experts from the highest echelons of government, the corporate and scientific world concur in their view that our industrial civilisation built on cheap, endlessly available fossils fuels is coming to an end. The view that global oil supplies either have, or are about to peak is gaining mainstream acceptance.

In a March 2006 article in the the New York Times online, associate editor Robert B. Semple writes: "Oil is a finite commodity. At some point even the vast reservoirs of Saudi Arabia will run dry. [...] there will come a day when oil production 'peaks', when demand overtakes supply, [...] resulting in large and possibly catastrophic price increases...". As we know these prices are already flowing through the pipelines into our economies.

The film is shot on abandoned oilfields, from Venezuela to the Arabian Peninsula, from Dallas, Texas to the apocalyptic devastation of Baku, Azerbaijan.

We have made ourselves dependent on fire and for Muslims that is some thing we have to come to terms with, and take responsibility for. Oil comes mostly from Muslim lands and it has brought with it constant war, global warming, extremes of destitution and obscene wealth and above all has made the earth an uglier place.

Saba Khalid



The climate is changing

A report by a panel of experts commissioned to investigate climate change has confirmed that human activities are causing global warming. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), appointed by the World Meteorological Society and the UN Environment Programme, published the Synthesis Report in 2007. The findings state that temperatures will probably rise by up to 4 degrees by the end of the century, sea levels are likely to rise by up to 43 centimetres, and that the world will witness more heat waves and tropical storms.

How it is changing

The earth's climate (weather) changes all the time, but many scientists now say that we are seeing an increase in the rate and severity of disasters like floods, droughts and storms. Most agree that this is because of a build-up of carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere, caused by human beings' excessive burning of fossil fuels such as oil, gas and coal. This has increased the temperature of the earth by trapping heat from the sun, (the 'Greenhouse Effect') causing 'Global Warming.'

What we can do about it

Since human beings appear to have played an important part in upsetting the balance of the climate, people all over the world are trying to find ways to cut their carbon emissions by abandoning fossil fuels and turning to renewable energy sources such as the sun, wind, water, volcanic heat and waves.

What Muslims can do

Islam teaches Muslims to respect Allah's creation and maintain the balance He created. As one fifth of the world's population, Muslim countries and individuals can make a real difference to the world's climate. Those living in rich countries can reduce their energy usage and eliminate waste from their lifestyles. Muslims should also be supporting international agreements like the Kyoto Protocol and the Bali agreement which aim to reduce greenhouse gases. Globally, Muslim countries that produce oil should be trying to make oil last longer and encourage the switch to other sources of energy. They should also be including sustainable energy industries in their long-term investment and diversification plans.

Harfiyah Haleem

Letter to the Editor

Dear IFEES,

We wish to sincerely thank you for Ecolslam III. We thoroughly enjoyed reading this newsletter on ecology and the environment from an Islamic perspective and commend your good offices for this excellent work. We pray you are able to continue this noble work and look forward to future issues.

Sayyed Muhammad Misawi
World Ahlul Bayt Islamic League

STOP PRESS!

The Qur'an shows the way to conservation

IFEES Breaks New Ground in Zanzibar

Please go to www.ifees.org.uk to view press release
More in the next issue of Ecolslam

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