

ecoIslam

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

(Qur'an 4:135)



Field visit by Nagari (local council) members, West Sumatra.

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

Islamic beliefs and Sumatran forest management

Ecosystem services are essential for human well being and all life on earth. However, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment states that nearly two-thirds of the world's ecosystem services are under threat, with watershed-related services being the most urgent national level priority.

Containing 10% of the world's remaining tropical rainforest, Indonesia provides vital ecosystem services for the international and national community, through carbon sequestration, climate change mitigation and watershed management for rural communities. High deforestation rates, particularly in Sumatra, highlight the need to promote and facilitate sustainable natural resource management to ensure ongoing benefits from ecosystem services. Thus, innovative approaches to community-based conservation are urgently needed.

Indonesia has the world's largest Muslim population - 88 percent of its 245,500,000 people follow Islam, and religion has a strong influence on daily life. There are several key principles in the Qur'an (Tauhid, Khalifah, Mizan and Fitrah) that underpin nature conservation and outline the human role in conserving natural resources. During August 2007, the UK Government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), supported a Darwin Initiative (DI) Scoping Award for researchers at the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE), UK to meet Islamic leaders in Sumatra to discuss teachings on the environment. These initial discussions with Indonesian and UK Islamic scholars highlighted the potential for faith-based teachings to conserve natural resources through changing behaviour, rather than just attitudes - especially when linked to multiple benefits for human welfare.

In collaboration with several local partners, a pilot project funded by a Rufford Small Grant for Nature Award was launched in West Sumatra in October 2007. Three interrelated land-use management systems that apply Islamic principles were discussed: i) Hima - management zones established for sustainable natural resource use; ii) Harim - inviolable sanctuaries used for protecting water resources and their services; and, iii) Ihya Al-Mawat - reviving neglected land to become productive.



Global Issues

Creating Environmental Awareness

...from cover page

Workshops held with religious and village leaders, and women's groups from three rural communities identified the above systems as being loosely practised in their communities through their legally recognised traditional (nagari) system. Within this system, a customary (adat) law exists that encompasses the whole social structure, including the relationship between humans and nature. West Sumatran adat is specifically structured in-line with Islamic law.

However, a lack of awareness about these Islamic systems, and institutional capacity to implement them, hindered their effectiveness. Further discussions with the wider community, after Friday prayers and in village meetings, found strong commitment to integrate and formalise religious principles within a fully-functioning land and forest management system, which would provide simultaneous benefits to local livelihoods and biodiversity.

Due to overwhelming support from local partners and the valuable information gained during both the scoping award and pilot project, a full project proposal entitled 'Integrating religion within conservation: Islamic beliefs and Sumatran forest management' was submitted by DICE to Defra's Darwin Initiative Programme and awarded full support in April 2009.

In July 2009, the DI project conducted a 3-day workshop hosted by the University of Andalas in Padang, West Sumatra. The meeting formally launched the DI project by introducing local and international partners to one another, to discuss how their expertise would be applied within the project and to identify the required next steps to implement project activities. Project partner, Mr. Fazlun Khalid, was among the esteemed contributors, and he presented IFEES's vision and objectives, participated in a workshop on religion and conservation and visited a local Minangkabau (West Sumatra) community to assess its suitability as a potential DI project site.

This 3-year project will work with local and international partners to establish a committee to develop and implement a faith-based community conservation outreach programme. The programme will strengthen and integrate the religious management systems of Hima (by mapping land and forest use systems and ensuring their protection through joint community/Forestry Dept. patrols); Harim (through watershed management) and Ihya Al-Mawat (by creating nagari tree nurseries and agroforestry systems to rehabilitate and reforest degraded lands) into the traditional nagari and adat systems.

The project will also implement faith-based conservation projects within state and Islamic boarding (IAIN) secondary schools in Padang (West Sumatra capital), collaborate with the provincial government to develop teaching materials for the provincial education curriculum (muatan lokal) and provide two Darwin Initiative MSc scholarships at the University of Andalas, Padang. Various publications and training materials will also be produced focusing specifically on West Sumatra but with the intention of serving as a catalyst for similar conservation work across Indonesia.

Jeanne E. McKay



For more information on the project please contact:

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or visit

www.kent.ac.uk/dice/research/islam_conservation.html

Darwin Initiative: www.darwin.defra.gov.uk

Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology: www.kent.ac.uk/dice



Workshop participants, University of Andalas, West Sumatra.

Editorial

The Copenhagen Conundrum

When 184 nation states came together last December in Copenhagen to deal with the consequences of climate change, each held a self-serving agenda. When leaders promise their people prosperity, they are then obliged to defend their positions when confronted by a need for change in the public arena. Under these circumstances it shouldn't have surprised anyone that the Conference of Parties (COP) in Copenhagen was unable to meet its objectives. The public quarrel between China and the US was indicative of the positions politicians take in this matter to the detriment of the rest of us. The US was concerned that China was projected to emit 60% more CO₂ than itself by the year 2030. The Chinese riposte was that the US currently emits 20 tonnes of CO₂ per person each year while the estimate for China is 6 tonnes. It would be sobering to reflect on the outcome for planet Earth if over a billion Chinese were to reach only half the American figure.



UN Climate Change Conference 2009

At a more recent meeting in Abu Dhabi, Muhammed Nasheed, the President of the tiny republic of the Maldives said that the "Copenhagen accord in its current form will not prevent catastrophic climate change." As the head of a country comprised of a chain of twenty-six low-lying atolls his concerns must be taken seriously. He further observed that "We (the human race) cannot cut a deal with Mother Nature" and proposed that the target for maximum temperature rise by 2015 should be set not at 2°C (the prevailing consensus) but at 1.5°C. The majority of countries, however, do not support this position and China goes to the extent of questioning the need for any emissions targets at all.

It must be observed that all this horse trading goes on in the face of repeated warnings by eminent scientists of the consequences of climate change to the planet should the human race fail to change its ways. Geopolitics do not allow for a rational discourse on climate change, although we can all agree that the situation is serious.

A common-sense rule in everyday life is to desist in a course of action if the problems it creates outweigh its

benefits. If this is true for the individual it is valid even more so for society as a whole, as the negative impact of our actions are compounded by scale. This matter is global and as China and the US lock horns we can see that little Maldives is destined to go under the sea. The first country to disappear from the face of the Earth would be a Muslim nation.

Our problem is systemic. At the root of this debacle is a competing nation state model locked into a capitalist economic paradigm which encourages a consumer culture which in turn sets no limits on growth. A recent report by the Worldwatch Institute about American consumer habits observed that "until we recognise that our environmental problems, from climate change to deforestation to species loss, are driven by unsustainable habits, we will not be able to solve the ecological crises that threaten to wash over our civilisation". The fact is that we all want the American way of life, but nature will overwhelm us long before China, India or the other developing regions reach a fraction of the living standards enjoyed by the so-called developed world. But being powerful helps because the more powerful a country is the less it needs to do to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Our conundrum is that we cannot deal effectively with climate change while at the same time promising to deliver limitless prosperity to the people. This does not mean giving up on progress, but it does require that we re-define it. We need a paradigm shift towards a better life lived within the limits of a sustainable planet. We cannot continue to peddle the consumerist nightmare that has led us to the brink of destruction.

The Qur'an reminds us thus:

"Remember Allah's blessings and do not go about the earth corrupting it". (7:74)

Fazlun Khalid

Founder Islamic Foundation for
Ecology and Environmental Sciences



Drought

Conservation

Culture and Communities

Islamic Gardens in the UK: dynamics of conservation, culture and communities

A ground-breaking study has been commissioned on Islamic gardens in the UK. The Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK, based at Cardiff University, has been commissioned by Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) to undertake the cutting-edge research project. It will look at ways in which the design and ethos of Islamic gardens might amplify messages about biodiversity, conservation and sustainability. This study represents the first significant academic project on Islamic gardens in Britain.

There is a long tradition within the Islamic world of creating beautiful gardens, reflecting the descriptions of the heavenly realm in the Qur'an. Such 'paradise gardens' incorporate elements of shade and water within an enclosed space, attesting to the desert environment from where Islam emerged and where such elements hold a particular significance. As Islam spread, Islamic garden design began to incorporate ideas reflecting the cultural diversity of the growing Muslim world.

The aim of this project is to investigate the need, value and viability of establishing Islamic gardens in the UK, based on Islamic ecological principles. The research will offer recommendations for ways in which these gardens could incorporate ideas of environmental sustainability and conservation of biodiversity. We hope to assess how, and to what extent, Islamic gardens that reflect these principles might engage British Muslims. As a result of the project, we hope to provide evidence for ways in which gardens built on Islamic principles can enhance integration and inter-faith co-operation within communities.

The project employs a contemporary, multi-disciplined approach calling on the expertise of key specialists. For example, Fazlun Khalid has contributed his considerable expertise in Islamic environmentalism in addition to facilitating access to his many contacts within the field. Another consultant on the project, Emma Clark, is one of the UK's foremost authorities on Islamic gardens. Emma is a designer, lecturer and writer specialising in Islamic art, architecture and gardens. In her book, *The Art of the Islamic Garden*, Emma discusses the art, spirituality and symbolism of gardens as well as giving a practical guide to creating one in the UK.

The Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK has itself gained a reputation for quality research into British Muslim communities. In addition to contributions from experts, the project also aims to collect the views of Muslims who have a concern for and interest in conservation. This will be achieved by the use of online surveys, focus groups and a review of the current interest in British Muslim environmental groups.

The London-based BGCI represents over 700 botanic gardens worldwide in 118 countries. BGCI supports and empowers its members and the wider conservation community to reverse the threat of the extinction crisis facing one third of all plants through its publications, training, education and on-the-ground conservation work. Established for over 20 years, the organisation has worked with partners in the Middle East for many years and is interested in exploring whether and how Islamic gardens which have sustainability and biodiversity conservation at their heart, could be developed within the UK.

The findings of the research will be presented at the World Botanic Gardens Congress in Dublin, Ireland, in June 2010. Findings will also be disseminated to British Muslim environmental groups, and to all those who have participated in our research.

We hope that the outcomes of the project will be beneficial to British Muslim communities, by giving them a sense of pride in their heritage and religious tradition in its UK setting.

We would welcome and appreciate any feedback on this project. For more information on the Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK please visit: www.cf.ac.uk/relig/

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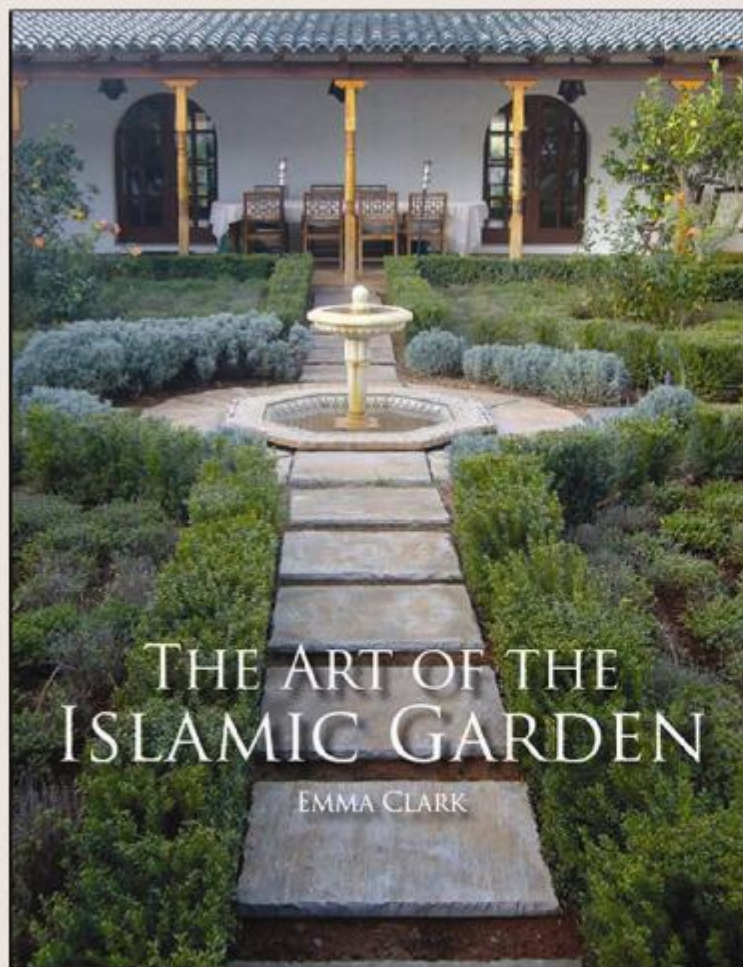


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Parveen's garden

Photos above and below: © Peter Sanders www.artofintegration.co.uk



The Art of the Islamic Garden is both an intellectual guide to the history, design and symbolism of the traditional Islamic garden and a practical guide on how to create an Islamic garden in cooler climates without looking out of place. Illustrated throughout, it introduces the reader to the fundamental principle that the Islamic garden is a contemplative refuge from the outside world, a reflection and foretaste of the beauty and abundance of the Heavenly realm: *Jannat tajri min tahtihar al-anhar*, 'Gardens underneath which Rivers Flow.'

Emma Clark is a writer, lecturer and garden designer specialising in Islamic gardens, and is Senior Tutor at The Prince's School of Traditional Arts in London. As an English Muslim, she combines her spiritual understanding of the Islamic garden with her love of the English gardening tradition, and puts this unusual combination to practical use in her garden designs both in the U.K. and abroad.



Global Roundup

News and Events

Tree Planting Target in Sight

The Greening Indonesia Project was initiated by Fazlun Khalid and Fachruddin Mangunjaya in 2009 to help facilitate and fundraise a reforestation programme across Indonesia. The project, which is a pilot initiative, hopes to raise £5,000 to begin to restore some of the devastated habitats of Indonesia. Hopefully it will be seen internationally as a contribution by the Muslims to reverse the processes of climate change.

Indonesia is one of the most bio-diverse regions in the world and its rainforests are an essential part of Earth's ecosystem. But during the past 22 years, almost half of Indonesia's rainforest has been lost to logging operations and it becomes increasingly crucial to educate the younger generations on the damaging effect this is having on the world they will inherit. It is essential to involve them in the efforts to reverse climate change. One of the original intentions of the project was to pair up Muslim Schools in the UK with Indonesian Madrasas, but initial efforts to interest the Association of Muslim Schools in the twinning idea have not met with the success the project deserves.

A dinner, held in London on the 9th of November 2009 to raise funds for the project, was a tremendous success. Strong links were made with the Indonesian Embassy who are now interested in supporting IFEE's conservation work. The ambassador was represented on this occasion by Herry Sudradjat. Many thanks are due to Mizan Raja and the team of volunteers who made the event possible with their generosity and commitment. Fundraising continues towards the £5,000 target and donations can be made via the IFEE website www.ifees.org.uk or at www.justgiving.com/GreenIndonesia.

Ayyub King & Izzat Heath



© Fachruddin Mangunjaya

The Prophet's Mosque

Al Masjid Al Nabawi was the first mosque built for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in Medina in 622 AD. The Muslims of Medina and the migrants from Mecca helped to build the simply constructed place of worship. They used stone for the foundations, mud bricks made of local soil for the walls, and palm fronds for shade. The Prophet's minbar was made from a palm trunk and the pillars holding up the roof were also palm trunks. In Egyptian villages today, palm trees still grow in the middle of some houses, and it is possible that in the Prophet's mosque too, the pillars may have been living palm trees. The building required minimum resources, next to no transport, and provided natural climate control through shade from the hot sun and circulating air. The wudu (washing before prayer) facilities were minimal. People who followed the Prophet's guidance and example used only a few handfuls of water for wudu.

Since then the Prophet's mosque has been rebuilt and expanded by successive khalifas and sultans in ever-grander proportions, until it now holds a million worshippers. It is hoped that Medina will be one of the first of Islam's holy cities to go 'green', with plans for renewable energy sources and water conservation measures. We look forward to hearing more about what, exactly, this will entail. Meanwhile, it is a good opportunity to recall this historic mosque's humble and eco-friendly beginnings and reflect on the hadith about the tree where the Prophet (peace be upon him) preached on Fridays, which cried like a child when a new minbar was built for him.



Simple and close to nature, the first mosque represented the lifestyle of our beloved Prophet (peace be upon him) and his companions. IFEE's Green Mosques website has pictures of some of the eco-friendly technology available to us to help reduce our impact on the planet. However, we can all aspire to live and worship together more simply, with more respect for the natural world, whether our homes and mosques are large or small.

IFEE are planning an international competition for the world's greenest mosque. The entry form will provide some ideas of eco-friendly measures that mosques can take: recycling; installing water-saving devices; car-sharing, public transport or using bikes; or generating your own renewable electricity. An interactive page will allow you to upload and share your eco-tips and you can also send suggestions, reports, pictures and video clips of your mosque to harfiyah.haleem@ifees.org. We'd like to get all the mosques in the world and all the people and organisations linked to them, thinking and communicating about how to live more in harmony with Allah's creation.

Harfiyah Haleem

Global Roundup

News and Events

Copenhagen Climate Change Summit 2009

United Nations leaders have acknowledged the disappointment felt by much of the world at the rather meagre outcome of the 15th International Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, but remain adamant that the summit has taken climate change politics to a new and prominent position.

In a statement issued at the close of the conference, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, "This accord cannot be everything that everyone hoped for, but it is an essential beginning."

Britain and the United States were pushing for a legally binding agreement that held the countries responsible for meeting targets on ecological commitments. But US insistence on ways of monitoring the agreement, including satellite surveillance, was vetoed by China who said that this was a cover for international espionage.

The conference was saved from a complete failure to make a deal on climate change in the early hours of the morning after it had finished, by the drafting of a political agreement called the Copenhagen Accord. 119 world leaders made pledges (financial and otherwise) to enact this agreement, which recognizes the scientific view that an increase in global temperature below two degrees is required to stave off the worst effects of climate change.

The Copenhagen Accord's 31 January deadline for the submission of these pledges has now passed, with an absence of strengthened commitments. "Supporters of the Accord have failed to make emissions pledges which are strong enough to avert dangerous climate change," said Bernhard Obermayr, of Greenpeace. "The Accord's 31 January deadline was no more than a cynical PR exercise allowing governments to recycle existing pledges and dress them up as effective action. It is the start of the Copenhagen 'greenwash'."

Founder of the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Fazlun Khalid, said: "Copenhagen was about moderation. This required the rich nations particularly to tighten their belts whilst the poor loosened theirs ever so gently. It was the height of optimism to expect nearly two hundred nation states to come to some agreement concerning this in a matter of days. The victims are planet Earth whose resources we steal from and future generations whose legacy we appropriate."

The next UN Climate Change Conference will take place towards the end of 2010 in Mexico City.

Izzat Heath

Protest and Pressure



Over 20,000 people, including IFEEES members, participated in this climate change demonstration in London.

Thousands of people made their expectations plain in marches and demonstrations planned to coincide with the Copenhagen conference. Green pressure groups and individuals demanding decisive action on climate change brought major city centres to a standstill. In Copenhagen itself the number of demonstrators reached an estimated 60,000, with large numbers of protestors being detained by police. Most of the 968 people arrested during clashes with police were later released without charge.

Quotes

The Copenhagen Accord is being generally portrayed by the media as a small glimmer of hope in an otherwise shambolic affair. Reaction from green pressure groups, however, bore testament to their growing resignation at the ineffectiveness of the world's leadership on this issue.

"A historic failure that will live in infamy."
- Greenpeace

"A chaotic process dogged by procedural games."
- David Milliband

"Well meant but half-hearted..."
- WWF

"The opportunity to actually make it into a scientific window of opportunity is getting smaller and smaller."
- UN Climate Chief

Views and Reviews

Views and Reviews

The Ethical Dimension of Human Attitude towards Nature - A Muslim Perspective

By Ibrahim Özdemir,
Insan Press, Istanbul, 2008

This concise look at our changing relationship towards nature is essential reading for anyone wishing to explore the philosophy and ethics of environmental issues. The fascinating history behind contemporary environmental philosophy is clearly retold from the Greeks to the present day. But the book does not just tackle theory. Özdemir's astute grasp of the issues that fundamentally affect our everyday lives helps to answer many questions that surround us in a changing world.



The author argues that there is a direct and strong relationship between environmental problems and our understanding of nature, and that our relationship with 'natural objects' depends on how we conceptualise the natural world. Özdemir believes that the present environmental crisis is due largely to an ethical position that is fundamentally anti-nature. Consequently, our attempts at solutions have been technical rather than based on earth-centred ethics.

The writer presents an Islamic perspective on environmental ethics, using numerous Qur'anic references. His conclusions are that everything is a sign (aya) of God's creation and that human purpose is to worship Him with gratitude and treat the Earth with respect. Although the Qur'an is inherently environmental, it is a puzzle that the environmental language is not overtly articulated when it is taught by Muslims.

It would be interesting to speculate on the outcome had Islamic traditions predominated the West over the last few centuries and how the ethics which underpinned these traditions might have provided a more respectful attitude to the natural world.

It is encouraging that Özdemir, a Professor of History of Philosophy at Ankara University in Turkey, in putting the Western world under such scrutiny avoids the biases and prejudices of past orientalist who wrote about Islam.

Fazlun Khalid

Letters

From Dr. Carl Safina, New York

I just wanted to thank you for sending Eco Islam. Very interesting and inspiring.

Peace

Carl Safina PhD

President, Blue Ocean Institute

School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences

Stony Brook University, New York

From Prof. Roger Griffin, Oxford

Every community of faith, religious or secular, needs its own equivalent of the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environment Sciences and its e-zine ECOIslam. At this crossroads in the history of humanity it is essential that human and scientific concern for the critical condition of the human biosphere is not perceived as yet another product of 'Western' thought and hence of a 'decadent' or 'totalitarian' cultural imperialism. Instead every culture must formulate the principles of sustainability and ecological consciousness in a way which is consistent with its unique vision of the world and hence form the basis of collaboration with other ecologies rooted in traditional values. After all, the Muslim or Christian need a healthy planetary habitat in which to live and to create a legacy for future generations just as much as a Darwinian scientist or a secular humanist. It would be wonderful if the common plight of humanity as a species could gradually bring to the surface the best in all creeds and societies, revealing the moderation, love and awe at the wonders of the natural world that should lie at the core of all Faiths.

Roger Griffin

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