

## Islam and the Environment: The Green Deen

We have an environmental crisis. However, do we understand the extent of this crisis? Do we understand the causes of this crisis? Do we know how to address this crisis? What does Islam say about environmental issues? This presentation aims to answer these questions.

### What's the problem?

The environmental crisis is made up of various problems: global warming, pollution (water and air), depletion of natural resources, waste disposal, loss of biodiversity and deforestation etc. For example, 11 million tonnes of plastic pollute the oceans each year, harming sea life. Global warming has resulted in increasingly more severe bush fires in Australia; swarms of locusts destroying crops in Africa and an increase in flooding including in the UK. Over five hundred species of land animals are on the verge of extinction. Moreover, research indicates that there is a strong correlation between coronavirus mortality and air pollution.

One particular animal that is in danger in the UK is bees. Over the last ten years the British bee population has decreased by a third. Bees are very important to the ecosystem, not just for honey. They pollinate approximately 80% of our wild flowers and also pollinate apples and beans. However, their natural habitat is being destroyed, they are also being negatively affected by climate change and pesticides

Climate change has also resulted in people going further into poverty in certain parts of the world with an increase of flooding due to rising sea levels, increase in hurricanes, increase in forest fires and droughts... For example, Hurricane Maria ravaged Puerto Rico (2017) destroyed people's homes, damaged water supplies, schools and hospitals which affected people in poverty most. Over two years later this damage had still not been rectified due to lack of funds.

### What has caused the environmental crisis?

One important cause of the environmental crisis is that the environment is not treated as a trust but instead as something which can be exploited for the selfish benefit of humankind. There also appears to be a correlation between wealth and greed. Kamali (2015) points out that the wealthiest countries of the world consume about ten times more natural resources than their poorer counterparts.

We live in a consumerist society: we are encouraged by constant advertising not to be grateful for what we have but to buy more and more. To change our car every few years. To upgrade to the latest computer or smartphone. To buy the latest clothes which are in fashion... All these require more energy consumption increasing global warming. Rainforests are being destroyed at an alarming rate to provide more land for grazing cattle in order to satisfy our greed for meat. Meat is now seen as a staple part of our diet, historically including at the time of the Prophet (pbuh), it was a luxury which was consumed rarely.

'Profit is king' is the mantra of consumer capitalism. Industrialists do not just supply to a market they actually create that market. If people are exploited in the process and the environment is damaged, this does not matter for many of them. Though to be fair there has been some adoption of green policies by some major companies.

Governments are often slow to address the main root cause of environmental issues (i.e. the behaviour of corporations) because they do not want to lose the support of big business. However, due to public pressure governments such as the British government have introduced policies both encouraging individuals to be more environmentally friendly such as recycling, using solar panels on houses and renewal energy projects including wind turbines across the UK.

This lack of care for the environment is also shown by the careless attitude in disposal of waste products such as plastics which make their way into the food chain. Ultimately by damaging the environment we face dire consequences.

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### What does Islam say about the environment?

**Respect for Nature:** There are more than 750 verses in the Qur’an that are related to nature. Fourteen chapters of the Qur’an are named after certain animals and natural incidents such as ‘The Cow’, ‘The Thunder’, ‘The Sun’, ‘The Night’, ‘The Fig’ and ‘The Elephant’. Moreover, there are many cases in which God takes an oath by some natural phenomena like: ‘the dawn’ (89:1) and ‘the fig and olive’ (95:1). These oaths are basically to show that these aspects of nature bear witness the truth of the following statement.

In many verses natural phenomena are characterised as divine signs indicating the knowledge, the wisdom and the power of God, such as:

*‘All the creatures that crawl on the earth and those that fly with their wings are communities like yourselves.’ (Quran, Surah Al-Anam, 6:38)*

One of these wisdoms is that everything in creation is interconnected.

*‘Truly in the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the night and the day; in the ships that sail the sea with that which profits people; in the water which that God sends down from the clouds, to give life with it to the earth when it has barren, scattering all kinds of creatures over it; in the changing of the winds and the clouds that run their appointed courses between the sky and earth: there are the signs for people who understand.’ (Quran, Surah Baqarah, 2:164)*

**Khalifa:** God has created the world in a balance.

*‘As for the earth, We have spread it out, set firm mountains on it and made everything in due We have in balance.’ (Quran, Surah Al-Hijr, 15:19)*

As each of us is a *khalifa* (steward), we should take all necessary steps to ensure that the entrusted property is passed on to the next generation in as pure a form as possible, that the balance in creation is preserved.

*‘The world is beautiful and verdant, and truly God, be He exalted, has made you His stewards in it, and He sees how you acquit yourselves.’ (Muslim)*

Therefore, Islam teaches us that we will be held responsible for how we treat nature (the environment).

**Mercy to Animals:** Animals are to be protected and cared for. It is forbidden to kill an animal for mere play. The Prophet once became angry when he saw two youth who had tied a bird or chicken to use as a target to shoot.

Even if an animal is to be killed for food, then it must be done in such a manner that causes it the least amount of pain, i.e. with a sharp knife and from behind so that it does not become distressed by seeing the knife. Using a sharp knife, results in the animal becoming unconscious immediately. In addition, the animal must not be slaughtered in front of another one to avoid emotional distress.

Moreover, Islam teaches us to be kind to animals.

*Abu Hurairah (may God be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet told his companions about a man who was thirsty and found a well. After going down the well and quenching his thirst he came out and saw a dog panting and licking mud due to excessive thirst. So, the man went back down the well, filled his shoe with water, held it in his mouth and climbed out of the well to give the water to the dog to drink. God accepted that as a good deed from the man and forgave the man because of that action. The Companions*

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said, “O Messenger of God! Is there a reward for us in serving the animals?” He replied “There is a reward for serving any living being.” (Bukhari)

**Conservation areas:** The Prophet established inviolable zones, known as *haram* and *hima*, where resources were to be left untouched. *Haram* areas were drawn up around wells and water sources to protect the groundwater from over pumping. *Hima* applied to wildlife and forestry and a designated area of land where grazing and woodcutting was restricted, or where certain animal species (such as camels) were protected.

Prophet Muhammed established a *hima* to the south of Madina and forbade hunting within a four mile radius of the town; destruction of trees or plants within a twelve mile radius.

**Planting trees:** The planting of trees is regarded as an act of continuous charity, the most desirable sort of good deeds.

*‘If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, then a bird or a person or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift (sadaqah) for him.’* (Bukhari)

**Moderation in living:** Said Nursi’s commentary on the following verse was that not being wasteful was a sign of gratitude which will result in God giving us more blessings.

*‘O Children of Adam! Beautify every place of worship and eat and drink (what you want), but do not be wasteful. Indeed, God does not love those who are wasteful.’* (Quran, Surah Al-Araf, 7:31)

### What can we do?

There are small things we can do in our own lives to help the environment and by doing so we also set a good example to others. Social scientists have found that when one person makes a sustainability-orientated decision others can be influenced to do the same too.

Some of these include:

- Reuse and recycle as often as you can.
- Choose riding a bike or walking as a means of transport wherever you can.
- Use fuel efficient cars.
- Use clothes lines instead of a dryer.
- Reduce consumption.
- Eat less meat.
- Try to avoid plastic packaging, instead try to use packaging that can be recycled.
- Buy organic produce.
- Spread awareness.
- Support environmental organisations which campaign and act as pressure groups on governments.

We would like to thank the Woking Study Circle for allowing us to use the material which is the basis of this document. The additional resources used were:

Abdel Haleem M.A.S. (2015) *The Qur’an: A new translation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Kamali M.H. (2015) *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam: The Quranic Principle of Wasatiyyah*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Imam Kamil ‘Preserving the Environment’ [www.aboutislam.net](http://www.aboutislam.net)

[www.greenpeace.org.uk](http://www.greenpeace.org.uk)

<http://earth.org/the-biggest-environmental-problems-of-our-lifetime>

[www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/climate-change-is-connected-to-poverty/](http://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/climate-change-is-connected-to-poverty/)

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## Handout

### Problems

- global warming
- pollution (water and air)
- depletion of natural resources and deforestation
- waste disposal
- loss of biodiversity

### Causes

- consumerism
- exploitation
- businesses' damaging practices going unchecked by governments

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### Islamic Teachings

The Earth has been entrusted to us: *'The world is beautiful and verdant, and truly God, be He exalted, has made you His stewards in it, and He sees how you acquit yourselves.'* (Muslim)

*Mercy to Animals: Abu Hurairah (may God be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet told his companions about a man who was thirsty and found a well. After going down the well and quenching his thirst he came out and saw a dog panting and licking mud due to excessive thirst. So, the man went back down the well, filled his shoe with water, held it in his mouth and climbed out of the well to give the water to the dog to drink. God accepted that as a good deed from the man and forgave the man because of that action. The Companions said, "O Messenger of God! Is there a reward for us in serving the animals?" He replied "There is a reward for serving any living being."* (Bukhari)

*Conservation areas:* The Prophet (pbuh) created inviolable zones, known as Haram and Hima, in which resources were to be left untouched.

*Planting trees:* *'If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, then a bird or a person or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift (sadaqah) for him.'* (Bukhari)

*Moderation in living:* *'O Children of Adam! Beautify every place of worship and eat and drink (what you want), but do not be wasteful. Indeed, God does not love those who are wasteful.'* (Quran Surah Al-Araf, 7:31)

### What We Can Do

Some of these include:

- Reuse and recycle as often as you can and try to avoid plastic packaging.
- Ride a bike or walking as a means of transport wherever you can /use fuel efficient cars.
- Use clothes lines instead of a dryer.
- Reduce consumption, eat less meat and buy organic produce.
- Spread awareness.
- Support environmental organisations which campaign and act as pressure groups on government.