



Green Deen vs Gloom and Doom: Environmental Activism Islamic Style

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The initial motivations of one Muslim environmentalist

Brought up and educated in Britain during the 1970s and 80s, I learnt about the problems of the environment: the greenhouse effect, the ozone hole, the extinction of species and indigenous cultures due to deforestation, acid rain and pollution from cars. Muslims schooled today would find it difficult not to be even more aware of environmental issues!

I started university life with the aim of making the most out of life, just in case there wasn't really a Hereafter! But after discovering the grim realities of pollution from rubbish, sewage, oil and even radioactivity right on our doorstep, I came to reflect that this life was not very impressive, nor like Paradise, and to hope that there really was a Heaven.

Later I found that the *Qur'an* predicted and described this mess and its cause:

Corruption has flourished on land and sea as a result of people's actions, and He (Allah) will make them taste the consequences of some of their own actions, so that they may turn back (to Him and to their senses).¹

The human race would probably have been wiped out a long time ago, as the Gaia theory predicts, if we had suffered the full impact of our actions and, according to the *Qur'an* ², it is only the mercy of Allah that stops us feeling the full consequences of our mistakes and bad deeds. His aim is to help us to realise the wisdom of following His guidance and laws.

¹ Ali, A.Y.A. (1991) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Maryland, USA: Amana Corporation (30:41)

² Ali, A.Y.A. (1991) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Maryland, USA: Amana Corporation (16:61)



Elsewhere in the Qur'an it says that humans should, 'do no mischief after the Creation has been set in order by Allah³, and 'not transgress due balance'⁴. My education made me depressed about all the 'gloom and doom' threatening the planet, worried that good initiatives would only be destroyed by evil governments or careless people. What was the point in trying to change things for the better?

The Qur'an reassured me by making it clear that we should just do our best to find solutions and to implement them, and that God knows and records all that we do, rewarding us for all our good efforts for His sake. Also, the people touched by the good that we do are souls which may benefit eternally; so no intention, word or action is ever wasted. The overall solution, given in the Qur'an is that humans should use their intelligence, of both heart and mind, their senses, and abilities to read and write, that God has given them, in order to study the Universe and the Qur'an, and to recognise the blessings given by God, so that they use them in the best way.

Recognition of environmental problems by Muslim leaders

Although environmental problems, including climate change, have been discussed and recognised for many years by increasing numbers of Muslims at grassroots level, it seems to be only recently that there have been widely reported official statements or declarations by Muslim leaders on these subjects. It is not that Muslim leaders are in denial about climate change – they are more likely to take the opposite stance – but they are usually pragmatic and listen to scientific evidence and arguments, and often are not talking to journalists, but to their Muslim congregations.

However statements by Muslims leaders on the environment are becoming more frequently publicised. After an interfaith silent prayer at the foot of a melting and retreating glacier, on the coast of Greenland, Musharraf Hussein, a British Muslim leader, said, 'This prayer is a recognition that we have spoiled the earth and we now need to rectify this by changing our lifestyles. We seek the help of our Creator to acquire the strength and ability to make the necessary changes.'⁵ The Grand Ayatollah (a respected scholar or leader of the Shi'a Muslims) Yusef Saanei in Iran said it was 'the duty of every Muslim to protect the environment'. Many 'fatwas' (religious edicts) across the Muslim world echo similar Qu'ranic readings that God entrusted humans to protect the Earth⁶.

Islamic connection to the natural world

The concerns now being expressed are not new readings or interpretations of Islam but a much-needed expression and recognition of the relationship between humanity and nature, and accountability to God, that have always been present within Islam. This relationship is based on teachings within the Qur'anic scripture, preserved accurately in both in oral, memorised form and in book form for over fourteen centuries, such as in the following verse:

³ Ali, A.Y.A. (1991) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Maryland, USA: Amana Corporation (7:85)

⁴ Ali, A.Y.A. (1991) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Maryland, USA: Amana Corporation (55:8)

⁵ Alister Doyle (2007) *Religious leaders unite in prayer on climate change*, UK: Reuters

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/environmentNews/idUKL0793503820070907> Last modified 7 Sept. 2007 4:59pm BST, Accessed 11-06-2008

⁶ Murphy, B. (2006) *Green Gospels: Environmental movement aims for religious mainstream*, USA: USA Today, Religion. http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2006-07-06-greengospels_x.htm Last modified 6 July 2006 15.57,

Accessed 11-06-2008, p1



*'It is He who has made you His Guardians (Khilafa) of the Earth. He has raised you in ranks, some above others, that He may try you in the gifts He has given you. For your Lord is quick in punishment, yet He is indeed Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.'*⁷

This verse and others make it clear to Muslims that the planet Earth and all its blessings, whatever portion each person is given power over, is a test for them- a trust from God, and their responsibility is to care for it, in accordance with God's laws. They will be held accountable to God for this, and punished or rewarded according to how well they fulfilled their duties as Guardians, or trustees, serving God. If they do make mistakes, however, they need only turn back to God, seeking forgiveness and trying to make amends, and they will be mercifully forgiven by Him, and allowed another chance to show their trustworthiness.

As the majority become urbanised, people have become increasingly disconnected from the natural world. Many Muslims today love nature but do not know much about it. Not only do they need to be made aware of what is happening, but they crucially need to rediscover the teachings that have been present in their 'deen', or way of life, from the beginning, originating mostly in the primary source for Muslims, the *Qur'an*.

The *Qur'an* describes the world around us, and ourselves, as the creations of God, all of which are miracles and proof of the Creator, which we should learn about and reflect upon. It states often that His power, mercy, and gentleness, His wisdom and intelligence, as well as His love of outward and inward beauty and excellence, all become apparent when we research the natural world, so that the ones who have deepest certainty of faith in God and His revelations are those who use their both heart and mind and who have knowledge. 'Over a thousand verses' contain succinct yet 'precise and comprehensive knowledge' of natural phenomena, including 'four hundred and sixty one verses of the *Qur'an*', that 'mention the Earth and its components'⁸, all of which are deep in meaning and rhythmically poetic, as are all parts of the *Qur'an*.

Islamic daily life is inextricably linked to the natural world. The Islamic calendar itself follows the phases of the moon, and all our knowledge of Islamic historical events are understood through this. The month of fasting, *Ramadan*, begins and ends with the sighting of the new crescent moon. The daily fast is from dawn to sunset, and the five daily prayers are arranged throughout the day according to the position of the sun in the sky. The 'salat' (formal prayer), as well as informal supplications, may be prayed anywhere, including under a tree or on top of a mountain. There are many Islamic laws, some quite complex, governing the careful use of natural resources⁹ as well as abundant general encouragements for environmental activism in Islam.

Islamic teachings encourage activism

The *Qur'an* says that God will never take away His blessings until human beings turn away from Him, becoming ungrateful for what He has given them¹⁰, which suggests an underlying cause of environmental problems- humans not reverently remembering to use their blessings

⁷ A.Y.A. (1991) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Maryland, USA: Amana Corporation (6:165)

⁸ El-Naggar Z.R.M. (2007) *Scientific Facts Revealed In The Qur'an: Milky Way27*

<http://milkyway27.wordpress.com/2007/12/10/scientific-facts-revealed-in-the-quran/> Last modified 10 Dec. 2007 11:49, Accessed 11-06-2008, p1

⁹ For an introduction to these see Khaled F. & O'Brien, J. (eds.) (1992) *Islam and Ecology*, London/ New York: Cassell Publishers Limited

¹⁰ Ali, A.Y.A. (1991) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Maryland, USA: Amana Corporation (13:11)



in the right, careful way, in accordance with God's laws of nature. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, 'A true believer is one who does not hurt others with his thoughts, words or actions.'¹¹ Activism, in Islam, cannot be just an individual acting alone. It is part of Islam to encourage others to improve. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, 'Whoever sees something evil should change it with his hand. If he cannot then with his tongue, and if he cannot do even that, then (he should hate it) in his heart. That is the weakest degree of faith'¹². Muslims, like Christians and Jews before them, are told that they will only be the best of people if they encourage good and discourage or forbid what is evil, with wisdom. There are many guidelines in Islam for how to do this most beneficially, at different stages and levels.

'Mankind shall have nothing but what he strives for' it says in the *Qur'an*¹³, encouraging Muslims to work hard to improve the world. An old Muslim adage¹⁴ sums up the spirit with which a Muslim should live: 'Work for your world as if you are going to live forever and prepare for your hereafter as if you are going to die tomorrow'. If Muslims bear this in mind then they should consider future generations in their decision-making of today, and work hard with consciousness of their accountability to their descendents, to God, and ultimately to their own eternal souls.

Sharing and careful use of resources

One of the five pillars of Islam is Zakah or Charity. The pillar states the minimum, of 2.5% of excess wealth per year, for those who can afford it, but in the *Qur'an* regular charity or help of all kinds is encouraged as a major part of Islam. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) explained the *Qur'an* to people concisely by saying, 'The best men (or women) are those who are most beneficial to others'¹⁵. This benefit is defined as what is truly beneficial in the sight of God- in the short but also long term which includes the Hereafter. In the *Qur'an*¹⁶ it makes clear that humans should, 'help each other in righteousness and piety but not in sin and transgression'. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) emphasised this by saying, 'Every day, for every joint in the body, a person should perform a charity.'¹⁷ The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said that Muslims should pray, study and work to become 'people of the upper hand' which means those in a position to give and help rather than being people in need¹⁸. The better-off have a duty towards others in the community, part of their wealth being owed to the poor. Giving can include something as small as a smile, prayer, or word of kind advice, as well as physical assistance, protection; removing or preventing harm; meeting immediate survival needs, education, adoption and kind treatment of orphans, and long-term capital investment on equitable terms¹⁹.

If those who are better-off can afford to do more than others to help the environment, which is in the interests of everyone. This does not mean that with one hand they destroy and the other they try to do some tokenistic act to help the environment, for example to gain status or more business. They are encouraged to do so seeking the pleasure and reward from God in this life and the next- not from other people; and to do so in a spirit of humility and kindness, if possible in secret²⁰. If green energy and products are more expensive initially, due to set up costs etc., then the well-off should play a role, as a consumer or investor, in facilitating their wider availability and affordability, and set a good example.

¹¹ Bukhari Hadith collection

¹² Sahih Muslim collection of Hadith, narrated by Abu Sa'id

¹³ Ali, A.Y.A. (1991) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Maryland, USA: Amana Corporation (53:39)

¹⁴ Quoted in books by Imam Suyurti and Imam Baihaqi

¹⁵ Hadith quoted by Imam Baihaqi

¹⁶ Ali, A.Y.A. (1991) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Maryland, USA: Amana Corporation (5:12)

¹⁷ Bukhari and Muslim Hadith collections

¹⁸ From Saheeh al Bukhaaree, Narrated Hakim bin Hizam 1346 & Saheeh Muslim 2267

¹⁹ Bukhari and Muslim Hadith collections

²⁰ Bukhari and Muslim Hadith collections



There are many Islamic Laws governing the management of the economy, which aid the sustainable use of natural resources. One of the main aims and outcomes of applying Islamic economic principles is the proper circulation of wealth between rich and poor. Methods include allowing equitable partnership type investment, without interest, to occur- to uplift and develop small businesses; fair wages from which to support families (i.e. no 'slave' labour); no immoral businesses; and no monopolies, excessive profiteering, or over exploitation of resources. Also, natural resources such as water are distributed or used under Islamic Law according to the needs of different parts of the community This type of carefully considered sharing of resources, internal investment, and regular charity, all help to prevent damage to the environment. In the absence of this much deforestation of ancient tropical forests, for example, has been carried out in order to generate finance with which to pay back interest charged on huge loans, made by International banks to the Governments of forested countries, to develop their economies. At a local level trees are often sold to gain the income required by poor people to fulfil their every day needs, especially where agriculture is not producing enough.

Kindness to wildlife

Animals are a recognised as an important part of creation, with intelligence spirituality, and emotions.

Qur'an 6:38: 'No creature is there crawling on the earth, no bird flying with its wings, but they are (part of) communities like yourselves. We have neglected nothing in the Book: then back to their Lord and Cherisher they will be gathered'

The community life²¹, and family relationships as well as physical, emotional, and spiritual feelings of animals are recognised both in the Qur'an and by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). All Creation is described in the Qur'an as belonging to God, and as continuously and obediently serving and worshipping God²². This means that they are Muslims, except those with free will to choose not to be, including humans. There are numerous reports of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in which he helps people to become more aware of the feelings of pain, fear, mutual concern and love between animals, and to treat them kindly accordingly, to please God. There is a reward from God, according to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), for acts of kindness to every living creature²³, good deeds towards them being considered as good as good deeds done towards human beings, and cruelty towards them as bad as cruelty towards humans²⁴.

God's forgiveness and rewards are given by God in return for the planting of trees and other plants that benefit people and animals, even to a dead person's soul²⁵. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said that, 'Even when the Day of Judgement comes (upon you), if anyone has a palm shoot in his hand, he should plant it'²⁶, showing the importance of continuing to do every small good act, in the sight of God, even in times of chaos and crisis, especially planting trees.

²¹ Ali, A.Y.A. (1991) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Maryland, USA: Amana Corporation (6:38) and Bukhari and Muslim Hadith collections

²² Ali, A.Y.A. (1991) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Maryland, USA: Amana Corporation (17:44 and other places)

²³ Bukhari Hadith collection, 3.322, narr. Abu Hurayrah, and Muwatta , Imam Malik's Hadith collection

²⁴ Mishkat al-Masabih Hadith collection

²⁵ Muslim Hadith collection, 4005, narr. Abu Hurayrah

²⁶ Ahmad Hadith collection



He(pbu) often said that planting a tree, or bringing life to dead land, are forms of continuous charity ('*sadaqah jariyah*')²⁷ which benefit the giver long after he or she has died:

It follows from this that, wherever possible we should prevent harm to species' of animals and prevent their extinction. Necessary development has to minimise harm to wildlife and eco-systems. In Islamic law an area called a 'harim' is set aside around particular developments, such as wells, towns, or woodlands, to prevent pollution of the water, ensure easy access or to protect trees or other fodder plants and their need for water. Special undeveloped, commonly owned but publicly-protected areas called 'hima' have to be set aside for restricted use, administered by the local village or tribe, with final decisions made by the local headman or sheikh. Grazing and cutting are kept to a low level, or prohibited during certain times, for example for bees to find forage during the flowering season or to protect trees. These can be used to preserve diversity, encourage regeneration or maintenance of vegetation, and protect watersheds and catchment areas – the equivalent of today's conservation areas. In 1965 there were an estimated 3000 himas in the Arabian peninsula alone, although the number must have declined since then²⁸.

Although human needs are put first, their vain desires are kept in check by Islam in general. Muslims (and all humanity) are commanded not to upset the balance or 'mizan' of creation²⁹ and should not 'change the work wrought by Allah (God)³⁰. This can be taken to mean not changing genetic codes as well as not harming or defacing the human body or those of animals, not interfering with eco-systems, causing extinctions and plagues, and not changing the 'fitra' (innate tendency towards good) in human nature.

Self-restraint in Islam

One way to reduce the pollution and destruction of wild-life habitats that are largely responsible for plant and animal extinctions, is to follow another verse of the *Qur'an*, which says, 'But waste not by excess, for Allah loves not the wasters'³¹. The theme of God-consciousness and wariness and resulting self-restraint is reiterated many times in the *Qur'an* and is obvious in the basic five pillars of Islam, which include 'Zakah' (yearly giving to the poor a portion of excess wealth) and 'Saum' (fasting from dawn to sunset at least thirty days a year in Ramadan). These are a training in patience and self-restraint in the use of money and possessions, food and drink, and in avoiding bad words and actions in general. Prayer teaches Muslims to restrain themselves from work or play to become more mindful of God. The pilgrimage (or 'Hajj') is a combination of all of these. The dress of Muslims is a restraining of people's desire to show off. This holding back and non-indulgence of desires should counterbalance the push for ever-increasing mass consumption, a very unhealthy measure of economic success which underlies many of the world's environmental ills.

Islamic principles and new technologies

When in doubt Muslims can be guided by the general Islamic principle from Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) that 'the merit of utilization lies in the benefit it yields in proportion to its harm'³², a very simple and common-sense approach which considers the long-term benefits and harms in this life and the next. Technology can mean anything from a wheel or lever, to an i-pod! It can make our lives easier, as in the case of a washing machine, freeing up our time and energy for more interesting, worthwhile activities, and can help us to do creative and useful projects, but can distract people from better activities and in the worst case be used by evil people for their own ends. If we are to use it, we have to try to minimise its negative

²⁷ Mishkat Al-Masabih Hadith collection

²⁸ Khaled F. & O'Brien, J. (eds.) (1992) *Islam and Ecology*, London/ New York: Cassell Publishers Limited

²⁹ Ali, A.Y.A. (1991) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Maryland, USA: Amana Corporation (55:8)

³⁰ Ali, A.Y.A. (1991) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Maryland, USA: Amana Corporation (30:30)

³¹ Ali, A.Y.A. (1991) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Maryland, USA: Amana Corporation (7:31)

³² Tirmidhi Hadith collection



impact on the environment in terms of energy use, chemical and noise pollutants, water usage etc. Also, Islamically, nothing should distract us from our daily prayers, remembering God, and from being helpful towards our family, friends and neighbours, and others who need us. The invention, production, and use of each form of technology should be considered in the light of these limitations.

Spreading awareness of environmental teachings in Islam

A lot of Islamic environmental activism consists of spreading awareness of environmental and health issues amongst Muslims, and about the importance of fulfilling our responsibilities as guardians and custodians (*'Khilafah'*) of the Earth, a role for which they will be accountable on the Day of Judgement. Raising environmental awareness amongst Muslims is still very necessary, especially in order to push back the tide of global consumerism, in Islamic terms *'the hub-ad-dunia'* (love of this world), which was predicted by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to be the cause of the downfall of the Muslims³³. Love of this world usually means people following their desires for worldly pleasures, status and power selfishly with little reflection upon the wider consequences to themselves and others or upon their accountability to their Sustainer and Cherisher. The extent of this tendency is a measure of Muslims' ignorance about their inherited way of life of Islam.

A Muslim international NGO, the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES), set up by Fazlun Khalid, is involved in developing numerous programmes about the environment for religious institutions in Muslim countries around the world. In Canada, iEnviron has also recently been formed- a network of encouragement, project realization, and material support from Islamic Green Activists and their supporters in Canada, U.S. and U.K. It's wider aim is to help towards the greening of the Muslim community. It works with IFEES, and organisations such as the Faith and Life Network; Faith and the Common Good, and their Greening Sacred Spaces programme; and Young Muslims, Canada. iEnviron is developing an online Islamic Environmental Information Resource web site and helping to mainstream environmental activities, such as reuse and recycle programs, for cultural and Faith communities³⁴.

This is a good example of how Muslims can and very often do work with non-Muslim activists in environmental work. The potential of this for building bridges has begun to be recognised. A week-long workshop on peace education in an Islamic context was held in 2007 near an eco-friendly pesantren, or madrassah, in Java. One workshop, by Dr.Saleem H. Ali, was about ideas on how to use environmental issues within an Islamic context as an means of peace-building³⁵.

Increasingly, the environment is an issue through which commonality and mutual understanding can be built, potentially making the way for more peaceful resolution of perceived conflicts of interest in the best scenarios, in accordance with the true spirit of Islam.

'The environment is a great unifier,' said the Rev. James Keenan, a Boston College moral theologian. 'You are not going to find anyone saying, "Well, there is no moral connection between religion and the environment." All the faiths can bring something to the table.' (Brian Murphy, 2006).

³³ Abu Dawood and Ahmad Hadith collections

³⁴ Who-Made Studios, Inc., 2007

³⁵ Ali, Dr.S.H., (2008) *Indonesia's Green Madrassahs*, Partners in Humanity: Common Ground News Service <http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=22537&lan=en&sid=1&sp=0>

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An example of faiths cooperating is the boat trip made in September 2007 by representatives of different World religions, to a retreating glacier near Illulisat, on the west coast of Greenland. The trip was part of a widening spiritual drive to combat climate change, and in particular a key focus point within a symposium called "The Arctic: Mirror of Life.", led by Patriarch Bartholomew, spiritual head of the world's Orthodox Christians. During the cruise, recognition of global warming was announced and joint silent prayers expressing concern for the planet were made³⁶.

My English Muslim mother has always been an example of activism both environmental and interfaith. She is involved in a lot of work to raise awareness about Islam and the environment amongst Muslims, and to increase interfaith understanding, both of which are now combining in the recently established London Interfaith Environmental Network. It just takes a few key enthusiastic people to show others what can be achieved, and activism can spread quite rapidly.

Much can be done by word of mouth. In the UK in the last few years a series of 'Qutbas' (Friday sermons) about the environment have been given in various mosques in London, and relevant leaflets as well as low energy light bulbs distributed. This was organised jointly by the London Islamic Network for the Environment (LINE) and IFEES, as part of a pilot scheme proposed by the London Sustainability Exchange. Lectures, workshops, seminars and presentations on this topic are also organised by Islamic societies or study groups such as LINE or City Circle, and given by Muslim scholars and activists: Fazlun Khalid, Muzammil Hussein, Abdul Hakim Murad, Hamza Yusuf and Harfiyah Abdel Haleem, to name a few.

Powerful new ways of communicating are making it easier to reach the large world-wide population of Muslims and facilitating the creation of networks globally. The growing phenomena of Islamic radio in British cities has featured many programmes on the environment. About ten years ago IQRA Trust ran a series of radio programmes entitled 'Islam, Science and the Environment' in which I interviewed experts in fields such as dietary health, animal welfare, and Islam. The Islam Channel, a global satellite television station, is currently helping volunteers (currently all women) to make a pilot programme on Islam and the environment called, 'How Green is your Deen?' *Deen* means 'way of life'. Muslims are utilising the latest technology, including downloads and live-streamed internet discussions.

Muslim environmental action today

What impact has raised awareness had? How much do Muslims actually act on what they know? Environmental messages are likely to have an immediate effect on receptive and sincere Muslim audiences in the way that they reflect about their actions, if only because the guidance reinforces what they intuitively know, and there is increasing local participation in Muslim environmental groups and other types of activism worldwide, much inspired by the more established IFEES. Those leading the way today are more likely to be enthusiastic, knowledgeable activists than imams, but everything has to start somewhere!

Connection with and attachment to nature need to be encouraged amongst Muslims today as important ingredients in cultivating future environmentalists. Muslim environmental organisations in the UK, such as the Midlands Islamic Network for the Environment (MINE) in Birmingham, are now recognising this, for example by having 'Out and About' trips. Often Muslims in cities don't even have a garden and are more likely to leave big conurbations to visit family in another big city in Pakistan or the Middle East than to take a trip to the countryside, something which the Forestry Commission in Britain is trying to change, along with

³⁶ Alister Doyle (2007) *Religious leaders unite in prayer on climate change*, UK: Reuters
<http://uk.reuters.com/article/environmentNews/idUKL0793503820070907> Last modified 7 Sept. 2007 4:59pm BST,
Accessed 11-06-2008



Muslim-dominated local councils such as Luton. The Asian Women's Network in Wapping has developed over the last decade a secure and water-supplied communal gardening area in the centre of a council estate to ensure that the connection to the land is not broken. People can relearn the skills of growing plants for food, medicine and pleasure that can so easily be lost after a generation or two have lived exclusively in towns. Muslims do not have to form their own organisation to get closer to nature or even go far out of a city. They can, and sometimes do, join groups such as the Wildlife Trust or British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, or go to wildlife study centres, conservation areas with nature trails, or parks, all of which can be done in the green areas within or on the edge of urban areas.

Other local environmental activities in the UK have included an Islamic away-day to look at green projects in Brighton and dressing up in wetsuits in Brick Lane to draw attention to the threat of rising water levels in low-lying Bangladesh. Initiatives from green Muslims range from organic fast-breaking which is becoming surprisingly popular³⁷, to Islamic green farms such as Willowbrook Farm, in Oxfordshire, run by Lutfi Radwan and his wife Ruby, which produces mainly free-range, organic and halal chickens and eggs. But it is still difficult for UK Muslims to find products such as these, which are also usually expensive, so, although eating meat is a habit of many Muslims in the UK today, the more environmentally-conscious often move towards vegetarianism.

Some success has been made regarding encouraging rubbish-collecting and recycling by mosques and the communities that use them. Ayman Ahwal, an English Muslim in his sixties, has just made a short documentary called 'Green Madina' about Birmingham Muslims armed with brooms cleaning up their local streets in a green 'Jihad' (struggle) against rubbish³⁸! Recycling by Muslim households is increasing as part of the general trend in the UK. Some green-minded Muslims are entering politics, for example Khalid Hussenbux, who is on the Green Party executive.

These are just examples of a global phenomena of environmental activism amongst Muslims at all levels from Governments, universities, and businesses to individuals-

good signs, but a lot more needs to be done, in terms of awareness raising, motivating, educating and organising. Parents, teachers, media, and community leaders all have vital roles to play in this by inspiring a love and understanding of nature, spreading awareness of environmental issues and Islamic and other religious teachings about the environment, holding meaningful discussions, and helping to start projects about solving environmental problems which can involve young people.

Although careful management of the environment was an integral part of Islamic Laws governing natural resources and economics, at all levels from the running of Muslim villages to whole Islamic states, this heritage needs to be rediscovered and revived in new forms that suit the urban age in most countries, as well as the minority status of Muslims in many Western countries.

Raising environmental awareness amongst Muslims is still a very necessary part of the work, especially in order to push back the tide of global consumerism- in Islamic terms 'the Hub -Ad-

³⁷ Alam F. & Malik, A.R. (2007) *Green Jihad*, Green Futures, A Forum for the Future
<http://www.forumforthefuture.org.uk/greenfutures/articles/602822>
Last Modified 09 Mar. 2007, Accessed 11-06-2008, p 1

³⁸ Ahwal, A. (2007) *Clean Medina Campaign- Making Muslim Brum Beautiful*, UK: Birmingham Friends of the Earth
<http://birminghamfoe.blogspot.com/2007/07/clean-medina-campaign-making-muslim.html>



Dunia' or 'the love of this world', which was predicted by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to be the cause of the down fall of the Muslims. You might think that love of this world would translate into 'love of the planet', but in reality, it usually means that people tend to follow their desires for worldly pleasures, status and power selfishly with little reflection upon the wider consequences to themselves and others, or upon their accountability to their Sustainer and Cherisher on the Day of Judgement, and before. There are still attitudes of apathy, complacency, suspiciousness and 'passing the buck' to over come. Yet these seem small compared to the largest obstacles to better environmental management:- pre-occupation with political conflicts and with every day survival for war-affected and poverty-stricken Muslims in many countries world-wide. All of these at least partly stem from ignorance of, and lack of application of, true Islam, and lack of a good education generally, but firstly require more positive types of diplomacy and economic help, rather than open markets and the type of outside political interference which prolongs the conflicts and exacerbates poverty.

Yet, the Prophet (pbuh) told Muslims to 'trust in God and tie your camel', which means that we should make our best efforts to study, think, plan and work, and then hope and pray for a good outcome, which is in God's compassionate 'hands'. He has described Himself by saying, 'My Mercy and Kindness prevail over my Wrath'³⁹. Life's ups and downs are all part of a test from God, to see which one of us will be best in our deeds⁴⁰. The *Qur'an* encourages us to keep going by saying that God is with those that patiently persevere in goodness⁴¹ and loves those that put their trust in Him⁴². God will send His Blessings and Mercy upon those who do not despair when they encounter difficulties or disasters, but say, 'To God we belong and to Him is our return'⁴³

Muslim environmental activists, in cooperation with those of all faiths and others in the Global Village, have many reasons to stay motivated and to keep fighting the 'gloom and doom' with the 'green deen' of Islam.

Useful Reading and Resources

Internet articles

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³⁹ Sahih Muslim Hadith Collection 4939, narr. Abu Hurayrah

⁴⁰ Ali, A.Y.A. (1991) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Maryland, USA: Amana Corporation (67:2)

⁴¹ Ali, A.Y.A. (1991) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Maryland, USA: Amana Corporation (2:154)

⁴² Ali, A.Y.A. (1991) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Maryland, USA: Amana Corporation (3:159)

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Khalid F. (2005) Applying Islamic Environmental Ethics, in Richard C. Foltz (Ed.) *Environmentalism in the Muslim World* New York: Nova Science Publishers

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Abdel-Haleem, M. (2006) 'Islam, Religion of the Environment.' in: Cotran, E. and Lau, M., (eds.), *Yearbook of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law*. Netherlands: E.J. Brill



Teaching materials

(DVD)

Ahwal, A. (2008) *Green Medina*, Birmingham, UK: deanmedina.blogspot.com

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