

Global Warming and Health - An Islamic Concern

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"Lo! in the creation of the heavens and the earth , and the difference of the night and the day and the ships which sail in the ocean of use to men and the water that God sends down from the sky , thereby reviving the earth after its death and dispersing all kinds of animals therein and the ordinance of the clouds obedient between heaven and earth ; are signs for people who reflect"(Quran 2:164)

The recent natural disasters of Hurrricanes Katrina and Rita and before that of the Tsunami and the earthquake in Pakistan which affected thousands of lives, have shown us how vulnerable we humans are and how equally we suffer irrespective of our faith.

The earth has been given to us as a gift from the Creator and we, the recipients of this gift, must protect and preserve it. Even though Samuel Huntington talks about "The Clash of Civilization" in his book in which he prophecies an inevitable war between Islam and Christianity, the fact is that Abrahimic religions and all religions have much in common in view of a natural world.

In the scriptures there are similar stories and ethical concepts in preservation of earth. The word earth or in Arabic, ard, appears no less than 485 times in Quran and the word shariah, Islamic law, literally means the source of water. No wonder green is the color of Islam.

Environmental statistics are well known to everyone interested in the subject .There are many websites and organizations which are dedicated to highlight them. It is no doubt that global warming is taking place. An increase in global warming leads to increased water vapor and abrupt changes in climate including hurrricanes. Global warming will also lead to more infectious diseases like malaria

The United States which has 4% of the world's population is the producer of 25% of the world's carbon dioxide. In addition to global warming, our threats are from chemicals, fertilizers, herbicides, industrial wastes and air pollution including smoking. There is a shortage of fresh water for human use as we use more water for industries and less for agriculture. Added to this, is the question of economic injustice, the North/South debate, poverty and lack of health care for people who are under privileged not only worldwide but even in our country.

God has created everything in this universe in due proportion and measure both in quantity and quality. In the universe, there is enormous diversity and variety of form and function. In it and in various elements there are fulfillments of man's welfare and evidence of Creator's greatness. Man is a part of these universes, the elements of which are complimentary to one another and protect each other rather than being subservient to one another. God has made water the basis of and origin of life. As He says in Quran,

"we make from water everything." When NASA sends out missions into the universe they are looking for water as proof of life on other planets. The Quran says "and we send down pure water from the sky, thereby bringing life to dead land and quenching the thirst of that, we have created cattle and man in multitude."

The message of Islam is "Mercy to Mankind". That includes not only to fellow humans, but to plants as well as to the animal kingdom. It is mentioned from the stories of the life of Prophet Mohammed that once he saw a companion remove a baby pigeon from a nest. Prophet Mohammed confronted that person and gently returned the bird to its nest saying "for charity shown to each creation with a soft heart, there is a reward." It was said by an Islamic scholar that all living things are partners to man in existence and they deserve their own respect.

Coming back to the preservation of water, Islam forbids the wastage of water and usage thereof without benefit. The industrial pollutants going through the waterways and oceans which will pollute the water and threaten marine life, are forbidden in Islam. Islam also considers earth as our first mother and all mothers have their rights. Their right is that they not be violated and be respected. The animals also have rights and Islam forbids Muslims to kill an animal just for play. It is said that if someone kills a bird for amusement, the bird will demand justice from that person on the Day of Judgment. Jesus (peace be upon him) instructed us to "Love Thy Neighbor". In Islam, the neighbor is defined not only fellow humans but all living beings around us.

Thus when a Muslim saint Imam Alhilaly was seen throwing bread crumbs to ants outside his house, he explained his action by saying "They are my neighbors and I have a duty to feed them"

How does all of this affect our health? God has given us clean, healthy lungs and we destroy them by smoking or inhaling second hand smoke. That is not the will of God. He has given us healthy livers and we destroy them by drinking alcohol. That is not the will of God. We Muslims are not supposed to harm ourselves or anyone else but we forget that. Religion should never be confined to acts of worship in a place of worship. The place of worship is at home and outside the Churches and Mosques, on the street where we go out and take care of fellow humans who are also members of our family. Quran says "save yourself and your family from fire." Scholars believe that the fire which is mentioned is not just hell fire but the fires that we have created from our own actions. Quran also says "Everything good that happens to you or mankind is from God and everything bad that happens to you is by your own actions." Our own actions here are our industrial growth, material greed, and luxuries that drive us crazy and endanger not only the environment but our own health and the health of fellow humans as well as other forms of life. "Do not create mischief on earth after it has been set in order" Quran says.

Effects of War on Environment:

Not only air, water and soil are polluted with air bombing but it has long term environmental effect. We know of effects of Agent Orange in Viet Nam war and effects

of depleted uranium shells in gulf war. Also , gulf war many oil fields were bombed in the region and oil continued to burn for several years leading black rain in the region which had effects on vegetation as well respiratory illnesses in humans. Mountains are described in Quran as firm anchors or pegs to stabilize earth (13:3, 15:19, and 16:15). It is my feeling that several years of intense bombing of snow covered mountains in Afghanistan and NWP province of Pakistan might have some geological and effects related to the severe earthquake on October 8, 2005.

The points of religious accord in environmental ethics that I endorse are as under,

- 1) The natural world has value in itself and does not exist solely to serve human needs.
- 2) There is a significant continuity of being between humans and non-humans, living beings, even though humans do have a distinctive role and responsibility.
- 3) Non-human living beings are morally significant in the eyes of God and in the cosmic order. They have their own unique relationship to God and their own places in cosmic order.
- 4) The dependence of human life on the natural world can and should be acknowledged in the rituals and other explorations and appreciation of attitudes.
- 5) Moral norms such as justice, compassion and reciprocity apply in appropriate ways both in human beings and non-human beings. The well being of humans and well being of non-humans are inseparably connected.
- 6) There are legitimate and illegitimate uses of nature.
- 7) Greed and destructiveness are condemned. Restraint and protection is recommended.
- 8) Humans are obliged to be aware and responsible for living in harmony with the natural world and should follow specific practices for this, prescribed by their traditions.

It is well known that a high level of Ozone has impact on our health in terms of bronchitis, asthma and other respiratory disorder. Now the question comes "What can we do ourselves?" There is pessimism that it is the government's or industry's responsibility and we individuals can not do much ourselves. This is not true. Obviously, we can lead a healthy life, eat healthy food, give up smoking, drive less and use less gas guzzlers. Whatever we can do to preserve nature and other living beings including plants, is an act of faith and an act of worship to the God that we profess to believe in.

Let me end with two stories to make my point. There was a boat in the ocean with two decks. The upper deck folks had all the provisions and lower deck folks had very little. In the middle of the ocean the folks in the lower deck ran out of drinking water. So they sent one person to upper deck to ask them for some water to share. The self-centered folks in the upper deck refused to share. The thirsty folks in the lower deck had no choice but to

dig a hole in the boat to get some water. Well, when the boat sank, it drowned the folks of both deck. Friends! We are in this boat of environmental mess together. Unless we all do something save our earth, we will have same fate.

Finally, there is the story of a wise man who had the correct answers to all questions asked. A person became jealous of him and challenged him. He took a small little bird in his fist and closed his fist. He thought that he will ask the wise man if the bird was alive or dead. If the wise man said it was alive then he will kill the bird and if he said bird was dead then he will open the fist and let the bird fly. In either case, the wise man would be proven wrong for the first time. The wise man was wise enough to know the trick of this wicked man. So he replied in response to the question asked "The fate of the bird is in your hand."

My friends, the fate of our Earth is in your hands

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