

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN ISLAM (PART 6 OF 7): THE CONSERVATION OF BASIC NATURAL ELEMENTS - PLANTS AND ANIMALS (2)

Rating: 4.1

Description: The Islamic view of the role of plants and animals in the environment and conservation of this vital element is fundamental to the preservation and continuation of life (part 2).

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The Prophet Muhammad was sent by God as:

“...a mercy to all beings.” (Quran 21:107)

He has shown us through his commandments and teachings, how to tend and care for these creatures. He said:

“The merciful are shown mercy by the All-Merciful. Show mercy to those on earth, and He Who is above the heavens will show mercy unto you.” (Abu Dawud, Al-Tirmidhi)

He commanded mankind to provide for the needs of any animals under their care, and he warned that a person who causes an animal to die of starvation or thirst is punished by God in the fire of hell.^[1]

Furthermore, he directed human beings to provide for needy animals in general, telling of a person whose sins God pardoned for the act of giving water to a dog in desperate thirst. Then, when the people asked:

“O Messenger of God, is there a reward in doing good to these animals?”Al

He said:“There is a reward in doing good to every living thing.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim)

Hunting and fishing for food is permitted in Islam; however, the Prophet cursed anyone who uses a living creature as a target, taking a life for mere sport.^[2] Likewise he forbade that one prolong an animal’s slaughter.^[3] He declared,

“God has prescribed the doing of good toward every thing: so, when you kill, kill with goodness and when you slaughter, slaughter with goodness. Let each one of you sharpen his blade and let him give ease to the animal he is slaughtering.” [4]

The Prophet Muhammad forbade that a fire be lit upon an anthill, and related that an ant once stung one of the prophets, who then ordered that the whole colony of ants be burned. God revealed to him in rebuke:

“Because an ant stung you, you have destroyed a whole nation that celebrates God’s glory.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim)

He once ordered a man who had taken the nestlings of a bird from their nest to return them whence he got them, to their mother which was trying to protect them.” [5]

He forbade that one needlessly and wrongfully cut down any tree which provides valuable shelter to humans or animals in the desert, [6] and the aim of this prohibition may be understood as prevention of the destruction of valuable habitat for God’s creatures.

On the basis of the Prophetic commands and prohibitions, Muslim legal scholars have ruled that God’s creatures possess inviolability (*hurmah*) which pertains even in war. The Prophet of God forbade the killing of bees and any captured livestock, for killing them is a form of corruption included in what God has prohibited in His saying,

“And when he turns away, he hastens through the land to cause corruption therein and to destroy the crops and cattle: And God loves not corruption.” (Quran 2:205)

“And they are animals possessing inviolability just as do women and children.” [7]

It is a distinctive characteristic of Islamic law that all animals have certain legal rights, enforceable by the courts and by the office of the *hisbah*. Muslim jurists have written:

“The rights of livestock and animals with regard to their treatment by man: These are that he spend on them the provision that their kinds require, even if they have aged or sickened such that no benefit comes from them; that he not burden them beyond what they can bear; that he not put them together with anything by which they would be injured, whether of their own kind or other species, and whether by breaking their bones or butting or wounding; that he slaughter them with kindness if he slaughters them, and neither flay their skins nor break their bones until their bodies have become cold and their lives have passed away; that he not slaughter their young within their sight; that he set them apart individually; that he make comfortable their resting places and watering places; that he put their males and females together during their mating seasons; that he not discard those which he takes in hunting; and neither shoot them with anything that breaks their bones nor bring about their destruction by any means that renders their meat unlawful to eat.” [8]

Islam looks upon these created beings, both animals and plants, in two ways:

1. As living beings in their own right, glorifying God and attesting to His power and wisdom;
2. As creatures subjected in the service of man and other created beings, fulfilling vital roles in the development of this world.

Hence the binding obligation to conserve and develop them, both for their own sake and for their value as unique and irreplaceable living resources for the benefit of one another and of mankind.

Footnotes:

[1] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

[2] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

[3] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

[4] *Saheeh Muslim, Abu-Dawud*

[5] *Abu Daud*

[6] *Abu Daud*

[7] Muwaffaq ad-Din ibn Qudamah in al-Mughni.

[8] 'Izz ad-Din ibn 'Abdas-Salam, in Qawa'id al-Ahkamfi Masalih al-Anam. This passage falls within a discussion of huquq al-'ibad, the rights or legal and moral claims of human beings and other creatures upon each legally responsible person. The rights or legal claims of animals are less comprehensive than those of man, and are subject to limitations such as the defense of human life and property and the requirements of human beings for food. It is, however, significant that in Islam the concept of rights or legal claims enforceable by law applies to animals as well as human beings.

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