



ISLAM AND THE ENVIRONMENT





Our Responsibilities towards the Environment



The universe, with all its animate and inanimate parts, is valuable; as it contains a unique balance and a magnificent integrity. The Holy Qur'an states: *"Do you not see that Allah has made subject to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth and amply bestowed upon you His favors, [both] apparent and unapparent?"* [Luqman, 31/20]. We human beings benefit from countless living things, plants and animals. We cannot, however, claim any ownership over them; for it is Allah who is the Lord and owner of anything that exists [Saffat, 37/5]. Allah requires from humans to



honor the rights of every creation as they are entrusted to them for their service [Ahzab, 33/72]. We thus have certain responsibilities towards the environment we live in. Islam teaches us the impropriety of seeing animals only as a source of food. Even though they are created for our benefit and service, they all have a value and meaning by themselves as they receive their existence from Allah, the Creator. Such a consciousness is expected of Muslims in their interaction with the environment.

If we as humans insist on violating divine orders and moral rules in our relations with the environment, the



order of the world will inevitably be disrupted. *“Evil has become rife on the land and at sea because of men’s deeds; this in order that He may cause them to have a taste of some of their deeds; perhaps they will turn back [from evil].”* [Rum, 30/41].

The verses of the Qur’an and the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) teach us how to treat animals and plants that forms the environment we live in. The Prophet Muhammad (saw) prohibits contaminating the watering places and the streets as well as the shade of trees where people take shelter and rest (Abu Dawud, Taharah, 14). He warns us against wasting water resources. He once



passed by Sa'd as he was performing ablution, and he asked: ***"What is this extravagance?"*** Sa'd asked in return: "Can there be any extravagance in ablution?" The Prophet replied: ***"Yes, even if you are on the bank of a flowing river."*** (Ibn Majah, Taharah, 48). Today in a world where drought, global warming, decrease in water resources and air pollution, and the like are increasing, we should more attentively heed what the Islamic teaching has to say about polluting the environment, over-consumption, and consuming natural resources irresponsibly.



In protecting and rehabilitation of the living environment, the Prophet Muhammad (saw) said the following: *“If the Final Hour comes while you have a shoot of a plant in your hands and it is possible to plant it before the Hour comes, you should plant it.”* (Ibn Hanbal, III, 184) and *“There is none amongst the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, a person or an animal eats from it, but is regarded as a charitable gift for him.”* (Bukhari, Adab, 27) According to Islam, we humans have responsibilities towards the soil; it should be revived, cultivated and made



useful for living things. In this regard, the Prophet Muhammad (saw) enjoins the following: ***"Whoever has land, let him cultivate it; if he cannot, let him give it to his brother to cultivate."***

[Bukhari, Muzara'ah, 18]

Muslims should reflect on their lives that every animal from the smallest to the biggest is valuable as a being created by Allah, and that they are entrusted to us by Him (swt). The Prophet Muhammad (saw) teaches Muslims to protect animals by providing them with shelter, cleaning, and nutrition. If they get sick, they need to be taken care of properly. He did not allow the riding animals to be overworked, ordered the sheep pens to be kept clean, and even treated the wounds of animals himself.

Islam prohibits all kinds of cruelty against animals. So much so that the Prophet made the following remark: ***"If someone kills so much as a sparrow, or anything larger, without a just cause, Allah the Almighty will ask him about it on the Day of Resurrection"*** [Nasa'i, Dahaya, 42]. He strictly ordered against harming animals [Muslim, Jihad, 32]; as he also forbade killing dogs, unless they pose a threat to humans [Ibn Majah, Sayd, 2], as well as making animals fight



for entertainment and using them as target boards [Muslim, Zabaih, 58; Abu Dawud, Jihad, 51].

The Prophet Muhammad (saw) tells the story of a man who went down to a well in the desert and filled his shoes with water in order to give it to a dog that was licking the ground due to thirst. Allah the almighty was pleased with this behavior and forgave him [Bukhari, Musaqah, 9]. The Prophet of Islam (saw) tells us another story where a woman who got angry with her cat, and imprisoned it until the poor animal died of starvation. That woman deserved eternal punishment for this behavior.



[Muslim, Salam, 152]. While the man who watered the dog was rewarded for respecting its right to live, the woman who imprisoned the cat was punished for depriving the cat of the same. Therefore, Muslims are expected to protect every living creature on earth. When passing by a camel back of which had fallen to its stomach due to hunger, the Prophet Muhammad (saw) said the following, ***“Fear Allah regarding these creatures which cannot speak!”*** [Abu Dawud, Jihad, 44]

During one expedition, some companions found two baby birds and took one of them. The Prophet (saw)



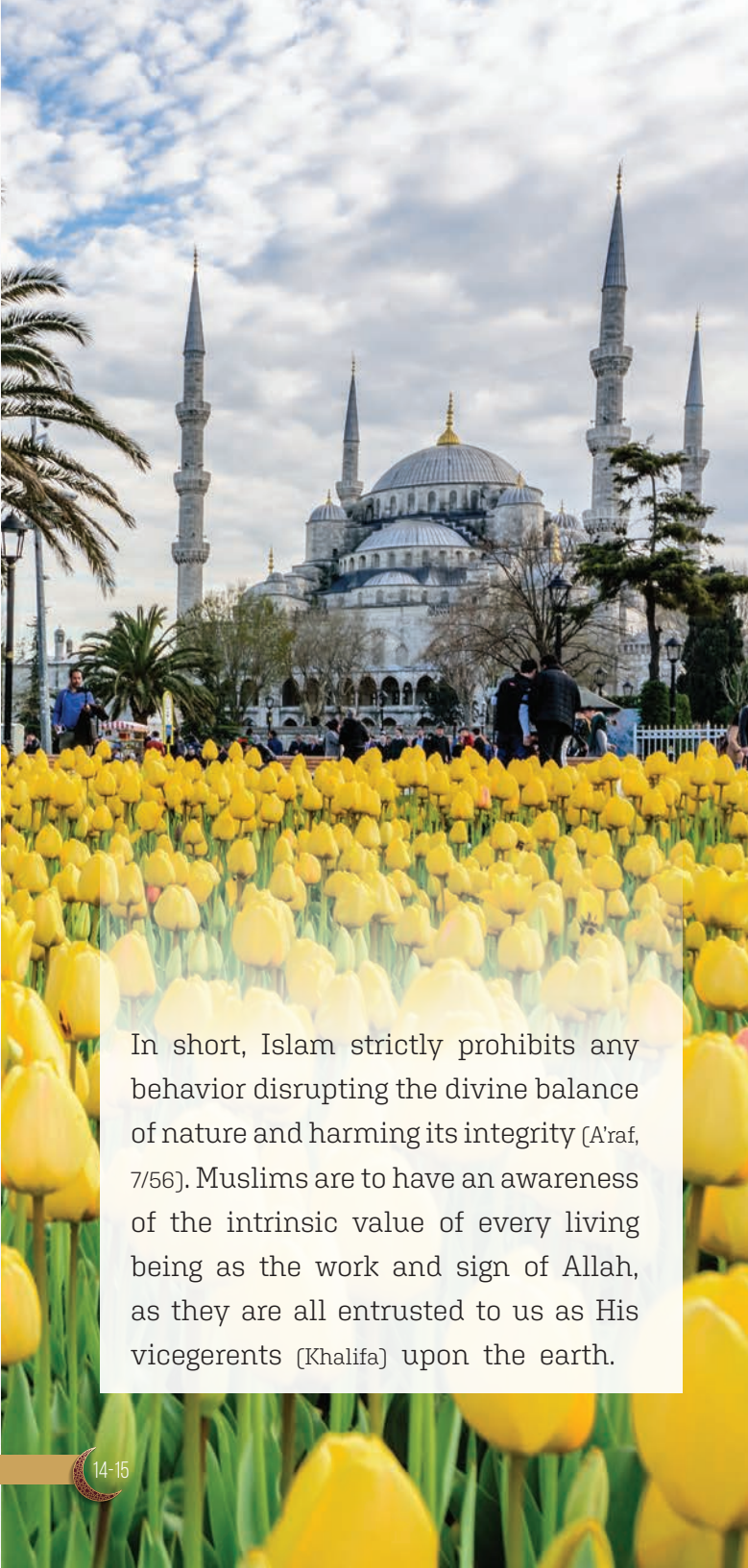
noticed the mother bird flying in search of its baby and said: ***“Who grieved this for its young ones? Return its young ones to it.”*** [Abu Dawud, Jihad, 113]. On another occasion, while he was on his way for the conquest of Mecca with his army, he saw a female dog on the road, cradling her pups and suckling them. He immediately commissioned a companion to stand by the dogs ordering that none of the soldiers should touch the dog and its puppies. [Waqidi, II, 804]

The Prophet (saw) did not approve of any physical violence against animals, not



even of any bad words spoken to them. He once wanted a woman, who was cursing the camel she was riding, to get off the animal and set it free. (Muslim, Birr, 80)

Islam encourages us to be compassionate and good towards all creatures; and at the same time to maintain the magnificent balance of nature as created by Allah, the Creator (swt.). The Seal of the Prophets (saw) says: ***“Allah is merciful with those who show mercy to others. Be merciful to those on the earth, so the One above the heavens will be merciful to you.”*** (Tirmidhi, Birr, 16)



In short, Islam strictly prohibits any behavior disrupting the divine balance of nature and harming its integrity (A'raf, 7/56). Muslims are to have an awareness of the intrinsic value of every living being as the work and sign of Allah, as they are all entrusted to us as His vicegerents (Khalifa) upon the earth.





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