ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Mashitoh Yaacob [Mash@Pkrisc.Cc.Ukm.My] Islamic Teachings On The Environment

1Mashitoh Yaacob, 2Ismail Yaacob

1Centre for General Studies Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia 43600 Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan MALAYSIA
2Darul Aman Teaching Institute Darulaman (IPDA) Campus 06000 Jitra Kedah Darul Aman MALAYSIA

Mashitoh Yaacob, Ismail Yaacob: Mashitoh Yaacob [Mash@Pkrisc.Cc.Ukm.My] Islamic Teachings
On The Environment

ABSTRACT

Islam is a way of life, i.e., a life with a balance between a worldly goal and the Hereafter. To implement Islam as a way of life a true understanding of every aspect of its teachings is needed. This paper contributes to only one of the aspects, that is, Islamic teaching on the environment. The attempt of this paper is to explore the teaching of Islam on human ethical behaviours when he/she interacts with other humans and other elements of the environment. The materials used in this explorative study are the Qur’anic verses, Sunnah (i.e., the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w) and scientific literature while the research methods utilised in this study are the analysis and synthesis of the materials studied (i.e., the Qur’anic verses, Sunnah, and scientific literature) as well as logical and comparative analysis of the results. The results illustrate that the Qur’an has not only taught humans about the ethical way to interact with other humans and other elements of the environment but has prescribed the rewards and punishments due to good deeds and bad deeds towards the environment, respectively. Adopting environmentally ethical behaviour is considered in the Qur’an as a good deed. The Qur’anic verses also provide Islamic ethical principles, such as halal (lawful), haram (forbidden), khilafah (caliphate), moderation, no waste, no transgression, etc., to guide human interactions with the environment including in providing guidance for developing the natural resources sustainably. Thus, adopting the sustainable development concept and the environmental impact assessment procedure in development practices are considered good deeds in Islam. It is clear from the analyses of the Qur’anic verses, Sunnah and the scientific literature that Islam has provided Islamic environmental ethical ways for humans to interact with other humans, fauna (animals), flora (plants and trees), land and soil, water, and air. Islam has also prescribed the responsibility of humans towards the environment in that to consume the natural resources at the level of human needs not human desires.

Key words: Environmentally ethical behaviour; Islamic environmental ethics; environmental responsibility

Introduction

Islam is a way of life, i.e., a life with a balance between a worldly goal and the Hereafter. To implement Islam as a way of life a true understanding of every aspect of its teachings is needed. This paper contributes to only one of the aspects, that is, Islamic teaching on the environment. The attempt of this paper is to explore the teaching of Islam on human ethical behaviours when he/she interacts with other humans and other elements of the environment. The materials used in this explorative study are the Qur’anic verses, Sunnah (i.e., the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w) and scientific literature while the research methods utilised in this study are the analysis and synthesis of the materials studied (i.e., the Qur’anic verses, Sunnah, and scientific literature) as well as logical and comparative analysis of the results. The results illustrate that the Qur’an has not only taught humans about the ethical way to interact with other humans and other elements of the environment but has prescribed the rewards and punishments due to good deeds and bad deeds towards the environment, respectively. Adopting environmentally ethical behaviour is considered in the Qur’an as a good deed. The Qur’anic verses also provide Islamic ethical principles, such as halal (lawful), haram (forbidden), khilafah (caliphate), moderation, no waste, no transgression, etc., to guide human interactions with the environment including in providing guidance for developing the natural resources sustainably. Thus, adopting the sustainable development concept and the environmental impact assessment procedure in development practices are considered good deeds in Islam. It is clear from the analyses of the Qur’anic verses, Sunnah and the scientific literature that Islam has provided Islamic environmental ethical ways for humans to interact with other humans, fauna (animals), flora (plants and trees), land and soil, water, and air. Islam has also prescribed the responsibility of humans towards the environment in that to consume the natural resources at the level of human needs not human desires.
values that are necessary to sustain persons and the natural environment (Mawil, 1990). The Islamic basis of values is no other than God Himself.

In discussing environmental ethics, tawheed “should also be at the center of the Muslim’s interest, regarding nature… pervades his/her search for knowledge and discovery” (Islam Online, 2005, p. 2). Therefore, the goal of all research about nature, for example, is to know and discover the truth; and the assertion of tawheed in dealing with ecological issues, for instance, reminds people of the ultimate goal of every human effort, that is to know and discover the truth, and the truth is the fact that there is a Creator and He is the One and Only Creator. Following the knowledge and discovery of the truth people should seek the pleasure of God by successfully performing the test of life via pursuing what is right and avoiding what is wrong. Under the principle of tawheed, “the natural world is brought under moral control; nature and ethics are integrated and the intent and action, purpose and goal, means and ends is achieved” (Islam Online, 2005, p. 3).

Materials And Methods

This is an explorative study of the Qur’anic verses, Sunnah and scientific literature to obtain the teachings of Islam on the environment, i.e., on human ethical behaviours when he/she interacts with other humans and other elements of the environment such as fauna (animals), flora (plants and trees), land and soil, water, and air. The research methods utilised in this study are the analysis and synthesis of the materials studied (i.e., the Qur’anic verses, Sunnah, and scientific literature) as well as logical and comparative analysis of the results. However, pre-requisites to the analysis and synthesis of literature such as doing general observations; corresponding with relevant Islamic jurists, and individuals; and participating in relevant seminars/events were taken. Such steps are to ensure that the understandings of the research context are obtained. Textual data (i.e., the Qur’anic verses, Sunnah, and scientific literature) were explored using pre-determined concept/thematic approach or framework approach. Passages of text were identified, and labels of pre-determined themes were applied to indicate thematic ideas studied. Each theme was charted by completing a table where each case has its own row and columns represent subtopics. Cells contain relevant summaries from the data set. All the texts associated with a thematic idea were examined together for patterns and connections and different cases were compared in that respect. The results and findings are presented in the ‘results and discussion’ section of this paper.

Results And Discussion

The Qur’an and Environmental Behaviour:

The theoretical foundation of how humans should interact with the environment is set by Islam. The Qur’anic fact that each environmental element is created by God with their religious and social functions dictates that not one of them should be excluded from protection by human beings who carry the responsibility of khalifah on earth. The practical application of ethical principles to interaction with the environment is part of the basic code of ethical conducts in Islam. Thus, adopting environmentally ethical behaviour (EEB) is as much a part of Islamic ethics as dealing with fellow human beings in a just manner.

EEB may be performed due to other reasons than religion such as contextual aspects, be it social, economic, or political. However, religious reasons are particularly important for they trigger higher commitments. This is largely due to the fact that Islam is not a religion of blind belief. A true Muslim is convinced in his/her heart and mind, through evidence and reasoning that the Qur’an is, indeed, the word of God and the truth, and that Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) is truly the final Prophet and Messenger of God. Thus, the faith of a true Muslim is not merely an emotional state but is based on solid foundations. Therefore, the faith of a true Muslim can have a big impact on his/her life including on his/her views, attitudes, and actions towards the environment (World Assembly of Muslim Youth, 2005). Thus, what counts as EEB does not change according to contextual aspects. For instance, whether one is rich or poor the behaviour of not wasting food is maintained. Having said that, living in a society, keeping with the ethical norms and standards of the society is also important.

“[W]hy should a person choose to behave in a manner that is considered to be in keeping with the ethical norms and standards of his society?...” (Moiz Amjad, 2000, p. 5). The major motivating force for a Muslim to adhere to such ethical principles is simply that it is a direct requirement of iman (the articles of faith of Islam which is not merely a declaration but also has to be followed with good deeds) irrespective of cost or benefit (Moiz Amjad, 2000) in this world.

There are a number of Qur’anic verses that establish the correlation between the human act of faith or even the act of disbelief and the conditions of the environment (Al-Qur’an, 30:41, 42:31). The Qur’an tells many incidents where ethical behaviours that due to a great faith yield in positive results (Al-Qur’an, 7:96, 11:52, 14:7) whereas unethical behaviour due to disbelief resulted in negative impact on the environment (Al-Qur’an,
The Qur’ân in a number of verses also reveals that everything in this universe is created by God in due proportion and measure both quantitatively and qualitatively, and He has produced therein everything in balance (54:49, 13:8, 15:19). There are two Qur’anic (20:53-54, 24:41, 44:38-39, 6:95) reasons for the requirement of EEB upon human beings towards the environment.

First, the environmental elements whether known to human beings or not have their religious function. The environmental elements are the signs or evidence of the existence of God and His greatness (i.e., infinite wisdom, power, and grace) (Al-Qur’an, 45:3-5). Islam considers the universe as a book of signs pointing to God (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002). Furthermore, each creature is created with wisdom, value, and purpose that is to consciously serve, worship and glorify God though humans may not understand how they do so (Al-Qur’an 17:44, 13:15, 21:79, 22:18). The function of environmental elements as signs of their Creator forms the sound basis for EEB. The basis dictates that human beings cannot mistreat any of the environmental element and species because they have their individual and unique role to play in glorifying God, and in bringing humans to know and understand the Creator by showing God’s infinite power, wisdom, and mercy. If ethical behaviour towards the environment is based merely on human need (bear in mind that with our limited knowledge we cannot be aware of all the beneficial functions of all things), it will lead to distortion of the dynamic equilibrium set by God, and misuse of His creation. To allow unethical behaviours toward the environment will destroy the basic elements and species of the creation. Thus, a loss of signs that reflect the greatness of the creation and the chance for future generations to experience these signs is also lost. One cannot be more wrong than to think that the continued existence of just a part of creation is sufficient to lead one to contemplate the glory, wisdom, and might of God in all the aspects that are intended because species differ in their special qualities, and each evidences God’s glory in ways unique to it (Islam Set, 2004).

Second, the environmental elements have their social function. In other words, human beings need them. Disregard for the environment, be it partial or total, will bring disaster to human beings. Plants, for instance, are the basic source of sustenance for animals and human beings on earth (Al-Qur’an, 80:24-32). Plants not only supply nutrients but they are also enrich and protect the soil from erosion by wind and water. They conserve water by slowing runoff, moderate the climate, and produce oxygen. They possess medical as well as economical values as medicines, oils, perfumes, waxes, fibres, timber, and fuel (Al-Qur’an, 56:71-73). Animals in turn provide sustenance for plants, themselves and human beings. Their dung and bodies when biologically degrading enrich the soil and the seas. They provide food (such as meat, milk, and honey) to one another and to human beings; they contribute to the distribution of plants by their movements and migrations; they provide human beings with leather, hair, wool, medicines, perfumes; and they also serve as transportation. In addition, plants and animals are objects of beauty. The aesthetic values of these creatures fulfil the human need for peace of mind which is a religious requirement. God created plants and animals that excite wonder and joy in the human soul to satisfy humans’ peace of mind, which is essential for the proper functioning and full performance of human beings (Islam Set, 2004).

Islamic Ethics and Sustainable Development:

Islam has core ethical concepts that apply in every aspect of human life (social, economic, and political) including human interactions with the environment – for instance, halal (lawful), haram (forbidden), khilafah (caliphate), moderation, no waste, no transgression, and so forth. These ethical principles do not mean that Islam is against sustainable development. As mentioned before, environmental elements, besides having the religious function, also perform their social function, to fulfil human needs. The merit for humans in utilising environmental resources lies in the proportion of benefit in relation to the harm that it yields. “Benefits and harm, judged as such in the light of Islamic knowledge and clear evidence should be considered carefully and weighed up” (World Assembly of Muslim Youth, 2005, p. 2). Hence, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) lays out the ethical values concerned. The Qur’an emphasises:

So set thou thy face steadily and truly to the Faith: (establish) Allah's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind: no change (let there be) in the work (wrought) by Allah: that is the standard Religion: but most among mankind understand not (Al-Qur’an, 30:30).

However today, we see nature being manipulated and exploited without proper assessment of benefit and harm and not weighed up scientifically by EIA, but based on fluctuating ethics for economic or material profit, or just for the sake of fulfilling the endless scientific imaginations of human beings. For example, the world was shocked by the creation of Dolly the sheep through cloning which took the scientists 277 tries before a healthy and viable Dolly emerged. This means 277 lethal birth defects and deaths have occurred during the process (Jones, 1998). We also have genetic technologies including genetic manipulated food, the ethics of which is controversial and debatable. Based on the warning of the verse, Islam clearly rejects genetic manipulation of any kind on humans, animals, or plants that is not based on a proper conducted EIA and on clear evidence of benefit over harm. To ignore the verse means disaster to humans and the environment. Environmental history in
many countries has indicated the consequences of ignoring the verse. For example, with no or inadequate EIA and reliant only on trial and error to succeed, the work of introducing new species into ecosystems in countries or areas where they have not existed before has been found to have disastrous consequences – producing plagues such as the killer bees in South and North America when an experiment to improve European honey bees by introducing the African honey bee to their test colonies went wrong in 1956 (Follegot, 2005), the cane toads in Australia when in 1935 it was introduced to control cane beetles which was not only a failure but caused a major disruption and threat to the food chain of native animals since (Haywood, 2005), and the possums in New Zealand when it was introduced in 1837 to establish a fur trade which today with 70 million in number threaten New Zealand forests, birds and the agricultural sector (Department of Conservation, 2005). These and other cases show that the consequences of some errors are too disastrous to be corrected by humans and nature. This fact should cause humans to repent (Al-Qur’an, 30:41).

Islam also has a clear stand on exploitation within the Capitalist economic system with its free market mechanism. This means not to take everything from the soil without giving anything back in return: for example, not to take all the trees in the forest without leaving enough to allow the forest to re-generate (World Assembly of Muslim Youth, 2005). The concept of moderation is emphasized in the Qur’an:

And the Firmament has He raised high, and He has set up the Balance (of Justice), in order that ye may not transgress (due) balance. So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance (Al-Qur’an, 55:7-9).

Islamic Environmental Ethics:

Islam clearly indicates that people should behave ethically in their interactions with all Allah’s creations such as other human beings, animals, plants, land and soil, water and air.

Human Beings:

It is often argued that the increase in human population causes environmental problems such as natural resource depletion and environmental pollution, therefore the fertility rate especially in developing and under developed countries should be reduced. However, today the world has become borderless; thus, this argument has become less credible. According to Gunn & Walker (2003):

The affluent nations contain only about 5% of the earth’s population but consume around 30% of its resources... If 17% of the global population lived an affluent lifestyle comparable to the people of North America, Western Europe, Japan and Australasia, they would consume (and generate waste) the equivalent of the entire [current] global population’s resource use and waste (p. 82).

Thus, it is the people’s lifestyle that is the biggest cause in environmental destruction and natural resource depletion. This fact leads to a much less popular argument that resource depletion, and environmental problem are caused by unfair distribution of wealth, and environmental exploitation by the rich to get richer, and by the poor to sustain their life. Today, economic injustice among the countries can be seen by economic categorisation gap – developed countries, developing countries, under developed countries. The main cause of this gap is interest on debt, and the only solution for the poor countries is to maximise the utilisation of their natural resources, which leads to environmental destruction. For example, a large aspect in rain forest destruction is the need for under developed and developing countries to pay the interest on huge loans made to them by the World Bank, and International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as poverty on a local level that is made worse by interest charges (World Assembly of Muslim Youth, 2005).

Human beings are part of the ecological system. Islam specifically calls for ethical behaviours towards other human beings (Al-Qur’an, 5:35, 17:33, 4:29) especially regarding life, religion, offspring, intellect, and property. If a choice has to be made between human and other creatures the priority should be given to human. Killing including suicide and abortion are prohibited unless for permitted reasons such as where the life of the mother is endangered. The ruling against killing also extends to polluting the environment to the point of causing some people to slowly dying such as by dumping toxic waste in water bodies. This prohibition is also true for what might be called committing suicide slowly, for example, by smoking, using drugs, or drinking alcohol.

Human beings are created with different biological shapes and skin colours. The biological differences and the skin colours are signs pointing to God not the signs of superiority of one race over others (Al-Qur’an, 30:22, 35:27-28, 49:13). Thus, it should not be the cause of conflict to the extreme of injuring or killing each other. Even the companions of the Prophet (s.a.w) himself were comprised of different races, for instance, Muhammad the Arab, Suhayb the Roman, Sulayman the Persian and Bilal the Ethiopian (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002). However, wars are still a major cause in killing and injuring of human beings and the destruction of other environmental elements. The Islamic position is “peace is the norm and war is the exception” (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002, p. 2). The Prophet (s.a.w) always gives priority to peaceful solutions. “[T]he first thirteen years of the history of Islam in Makkah [Mecca] reflect passive resistance… [However,] self-defense is permitted to
The Qur’an (6:38) emphasises that animals form communities like those of humans. The Prophet (s.a.w) said: “Do not cause animals under their care to die of starvation or thirst is punished by God in hell fire (Islam Set, 2004). He also told a story of a person whose sins God pardoned for the act of giving water to a thirsty dog, and a person who will be punished in hell fire for tying a cat without feeding it nor allowing it to find food on its own. Then when the people asked, “O Messenger of God, is there a reward in doing good to these animals?” (Islam Set, 2004, Section 2, No. 4, p. 3). He said, “There is a reward in doing good to every living thing” (p. 3). In the Prophetic tradition, animals and especially livestock have rights regarding their treatment by human beings. Those rights are (Islam Set, 2004):

[T]hat 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 must use a sharp object which will save the animal from the pain if a blunted object was used. One also must hide the sharp object from the sight of the animal. Furthermore, one must also hide the slaughtering of one animal from the sight of other animals. Prophet (s.a.w) said: “… and excel in slaughtering; sharpen your blade [so you may] relieve your slaughtered [animal] … Would you like it to die twice? Why didn’t you sharpen your blade before laying it down?” (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002, p. 5).

The Prophet (s.a.w) also commanded human beings to provide for the needs of animals under their care and in general, and he warned that whoever causes an animal under their care to die of starvation or thirst is punished by God in hell fire (Islam Set, 2004). He also told a story of a person whose sins God pardoned for the act of giving water to a thirsty dog, and a person who will be punished in hell fire for tying a cat without feeding it nor allowing it to find food on its own. Then when the people asked, “O Messenger of God, is there a reward in doing good to these animals?” (Islam Set, 2004, Section 2, No. 4, p. 3). He said, “There is a reward in doing good to every living thing” (p. 3). In the Prophetic tradition, animals and especially livestock have rights regarding their treatment by human beings. Those rights are (Islam Set, 2004):

[T]hat 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 must use a sharp object which will save the animal from the pain if a blunted object was used. One also must hide the sharp object from the sight of the animal. Furthermore, one must also hide the slaughtering of one animal from the sight of other animals. Prophet (s.a.w) said: “… and excel in slaughtering; sharpen your blade [so you may] relieve your slaughtered [animal] … Would you like it to die twice? Why didn’t you sharpen your blade before laying it down?” (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002, p. 5).

The Prophet (s.a.w) also commanded human beings to provide for the needs of animals under their care and in general, and he warned that whoever causes an animal under their care to die of starvation or thirst is punished by God in hell fire (Islam Set, 2004). He also told a story of a person whose sins God pardoned for the act of giving water to a thirsty dog, and a person who will be punished in hell fire for tying a cat without feeding it nor allowing it to find food on its own. Then when the people asked, “O Messenger of God, is there a reward in doing good to these animals?” (Islam Set, 2004, Section 2, No. 4, p. 3). He said, “There is a reward in doing good to every living thing” (p. 3). In the Prophetic tradition, animals and especially livestock have rights regarding their treatment by human beings. Those rights are (Islam Set, 2004):

[T]hat 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 must use a sharp object which will save the animal from the pain if a blunted object was used. One also must hide the sharp object from the sight of the animal. Furthermore, one must also hide the slaughtering of one animal from the sight of other animals. Prophet (s.a.w) said: “… and excel in slaughtering; sharpen your blade [so you may] relieve your slaughtered [animal] … Would you like it to die twice? Why didn’t you sharpen your blade before laying it down?” (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002, p. 5).

Clearly, the protection of animals in Islam also extends to hunting and fishing activity including the prohibition of hunting tools that cause continuous pain such as traps that lock on the leg of the animal. Hunting out of necessity (for food) is permitted; if it is for fun, fur, games or sport, it is detested; and if it causes injustice to people, by destroying their fields and property, it is prohibited (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002). The Prophet (s.a.w) did not tolerate any hunting which was not out of necessity; as many incidents show. The Prophet (s.a.w) said: “Do not ‘ride’ on silk and tiger fur” (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002, p. 7). This means that the fur of wild cats cannot be used whether for sitting on saddles or in homes. Once, in the absence of the Prophet (s.a.w), a member of his travelling group took away two chicks from a bird, the bird become anxious, and when the Prophet (s.a.w) came and saw this, he said: “Who caused her to become bereaved [by taking away] her two children? Return her two children to her!” (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002, p. 5-6). In another hadith, the Prophet warned people of the punishment on the Judgment Day for killing or ill-treating animals (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002):

‘No human being kills a sparrow or [something] larger, without right, except that God will ask him about it (hold him responsible!) on the Day of Judgment.’ It was said: ‘O Prophet of God! What its right?’ He said: ‘Its right is that you slaughter it and eat it, not that you decapitate it and throw it! … ‘If you kill a sparrow senselessly, it will hasten to God on the Day of Judgment saying: ‘O Lord! So and So killed me for play and not for use!’ (p. 6).

In line with many hadith, hitting animals, marking them in the face, setting them against one another (such as ‘wrestling’ bulls), riding on weak animals or putting too much load on animals (i.e., more than the animals can carry without harm) are prohibited in Islam. Animals are protected in Islam not only regarding physical
harm but also from insult and curse. Once, the Prophet (s.a.w) set a camel free after it has been cursed by a member of his travelling group (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002).

The protection of animals in Islam can also be seen in the story of Prophet Sulayman (a.s) in the Qur’ān (27:18-19); who changed the path of his army to avoid hurting a colony of ants. His position towards the ants was then confirmed by a hadith where the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) prohibited the killing of four creatures – the ant, the bee, the hoopoe and the sparrow-hawk. The Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) also prohibited 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, “Because an ant stung you, you have destroyed a whole nation that celebrates God’s glory” (Islam Set, 2004, Section 2, No. 4, p. 3). Furthermore, the Prophet (s.a.w) prohibited the killing of bees and any captured livestock for killing them is a form of corruption included in what God has forbidden (Al-Qur’ān, 2:205) (Islam Set, 2004).

In another Qur’ānic (11:40) verse on Prophet Noah (a.s), God commanded him to take with him a pair of every species into the ark to prevent the extinction of any species. And even during the pilgrimage in Mecca, killing of animals and cutting of plants are not only prohibited but also punished (Al-Qur’ān, 5:98) (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002).

**Flora (Plants and Trees):**

In Islam, cutting or destroying plants without justification are prohibited and planting or growing more plants and trees are encouraged. Thus, the destruction of plants or forest by harvesting (for timber and fuel, grazing, and all other utilization of plants) in excess of its natural regeneration is also forbidden. The Prophet (s.a.w) once said: “When doomsday comes, if someone has a palm shoot in his hand, he should plant it” (Francesca De Chatel, 2003, p. 2). Even when all worldly hope is lost for human beings, one should sustain nature’s growth (Francesca De Chatel, 2003). Planting and protecting plants are acts of worshipping God and are greatly rewarded. The Prophet (s.a.w) said: “There is none amongst the believers who plants a tree, or sows a seed, and then a bird, or a person, or an animal eats thereof, but it is regarded as having given a charitable gift [for which there is great recompense]” (Francesca De Chatel, 2003, p. 1).

Islam advocates the protection of plants even during wars, as mentioned earlier; undoubtedly, it must be more so during peace time (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002). In Islam, even the life of one tree is appreciated. With the aim of preventing the destruction of valuable habitat for God’s creatures, the Prophet (s.a.w) prohibited mankind to unjustifiably cut down any tree which provides valuable shelter to humans and animals. He said: “He who cuts a lote-tree [without justification], God will send him to Hellfire” (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002, p. 10). Thus, the act of deforestation without justification and the activities that cause acid rain which then leads to the destruction of forest are prohibited and are clearly a great sin that will be severely punished.

**Land and Soil:**

Land and soil are essential sources for the sustenance of human life and the lives of other creatures (Al-Qur’ān, 55:10). The word ‘earth,’ that is considered by Islam to be a source of purity and a place for worship of Allah, occurs in the Qur’ān 485 times (Mawil, 1990). God has made the soil fertile for vegetation to grow, upon which the livelihood of humans and animals depend. The solid constituents of the human body, living animals and plants are made from the minerals of the earth (Al-Qur’ān, 30:20). God has also made the land as the home or habitat for all creatures (Al-Qur’ān, 71:17-18), and land also has value as open space (Al-Qur’ān, 71:19-20). He has made the mountains to catch and store the rain and to perform a role in stabilizing the crust of the earth (Al-Qur’ān 77:25-27, 79:30-33, 15:19-20, 36:33-35). Thus, human beings should give thanks to God by maintaining the productivity of the soil, and not exposing it to erosion by wind and flood. In activities that relate to the soil such as building, farming, grazing, forestry, or mining, humans should preserve and enhance soil’s fertility and prevent soil degradation. To cause degradation of the soil is to deny God’s tremendous gifts for so many forms of life depend on it, and such acts of destruction are clearly forbidden in Islam. The Prophet (s.a.w) declared: “The whole earth has been created as a place of worship for me, pure and clean” (Islam Set, 2004, Section 2, No. 3, p. 2). In the time of the Prophet (s.a.w) the practice of Islamic environmental ethics towards land and soil can be traced through the concept of hima which mean protected zones (unused areas) and it has been continuously practised by Saudi Arabia and a few other Muslim countries (Mawil, 1990).

Protecting the land and keeping it clean from pollution are also indicated in many other hadith. For example, the Prophet (s.a.w) asked Muslims to clean their courtyards, and remove obstacles from the path of people, which means the removal of material obstacles or solid waste, which constitute a kind of pollution. To prevent pollution, the Prophet (s.a.w) also prohibited the act of relieving oneself in the path of people, or in the shade where people usually rest, and where there are water sources such as ponds, rivers and so forth. In the light of these hadith, if human waste is considered a great pollution to land and water bodies, then it must be
more so for chemicals such as pesticides, insecticides, herbicides and so on. Therefore, the uncontrolled use of these chemicals must be stopped.

Once, the Caliph Umar Ibn Al-Khattab sent a new governor (Abu Musa) to a place named Al-Basrah, and the new governor addressed the people saying (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002): “I was sent to you by ‘Umar Ibn Al-Khattab in order to teach you the Book of your Lord [i.e., the Qur’an], the Sunnah [of your Prophet], and to clean your streets” (p. 11).

Water:

One of the functions of water is as the basis and origin of life (Al-Qur’an, 21:30; 2:164, 6:99, 22:5, 25:48-49, 56:68-70, 67:30). It purifies the body and clothing of all dirt, impurities and defilement so that human may encounter God clean and pure (Al-Qur’an, 8:11). Water bodies like lakes, seas, and oceans, which God has made as habitat for many beings, play important roles in the sustenance of life and the development of the earth (Al-Qur’an, 16:14, 5:96) (Islam Set, 2004). In the time of the Prophet (s.a.w) the concept of harim or inviolable zones was practised. The inviolable zones can be found in association with wells, natural springs, underground water channels, rivers and trees planted on barren land (Mawil, 1990).

In the light of many Qur’anic verses, there is no doubt that the protection of water is fundamental to the preservation and continuation of life in its various forms. Thus, all acts that cause or lead to the destruction of the biological or social functions of water by destroying or polluting it are forbidden. The juristic principle is, “what leads to the prohibited is itself prohibited” (Islam Set, 2004, Section 2, No. 1, p. 4).

Since God has created water as so important for the sustenance of life, every living being is entitled to use it without monopoly, usurpation, despoilment, wastage, or abuse. In the Qur’an (54:28), God commanded the people of Thamud and their camels that the water should be shared between them. In addition, the Prophet (s.a.w) said “Muslims are to share in these three things: water, pasture, and fire” (Islam Set, 2004, Section 2, No. 1, p. 5). Excessive use of water is forbidden; this applies to private use as well as public, and whether the water is scarce or abundant. The Prophet (s.a.w), once said to his companion Sa’d, who was washing for prayer, “What is this wastage, O Sa’d? “Is there wastage even in washing for prayer?” asked Sa’d; and he said, “Yes, even if you are by a flowing river!” (Islam Set, 2004, Section 2, No. 1, p. 5).

Every living being on earth, by the will of God are made to be dependent for their existence on water (Al-Qur’an, 16:65, 30:24, 50:9). To protect water sources, the Prophet (s.a.w) prohibited a person to take a bath in clean still water. Many hadith emphasized the proper use of water without wasting it. The Prophet (s.a.w) even limited the use of water for ablution. He performed ablation three times daily and said: “Whoever increases [more than three] he does injustice and wrong” (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002, p. 12). He also said: “There will be a people amongst this Ummah [community] who will transgress in their supplication and ablation” (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002, p. 12). The Prophet (s.a.w) gave a number of examples on how to save water such as the use of only one mudd of water (a measure equal to a handful of water) for ablution and clean oneself with only the amount of water needed (Mustafa Abu-Sway, 2002).

Air:

Air is not in any way less important than other environmental elements discussed earlier for the sustenance and preservation of life (Al-Qur’an, 7:57) such as for human and animals to breathe, and for the vitally important role of the winds in pollination (Al-Qur’an, 15:22). The winds are also clear evidence of God’s omnipotence and grace, and the perfection of design in His creation (Al-Qur’an, 2:164). The biological and social functions of air and its elements make it vital for its protection from impurity and pollution. Hence, any activity that pollutes the air and ruins its function is an attempt to obstruct God’s wisdom toward His creation and is forbidden (Islam Set, 2004).

At the time of the Prophet (s.a.w), even activities that resulted in offensive smells and odours in public places were prohibited. The prohibition of Muslims relieving themselves near places of rest (such as under a tree) or near people’s paths mentioned earlier, is one of the preventive measures for air pollution (i.e., offensive smells) and offensive scenes. Another hadith that can be associated with the protection of fresh air is the prohibition by the Prophet (s.a.w) of people who eat garlic or onion from coming to the mosque or near to other Muslims until the smells dissolved. Thus, if the smells of onions and garlic were given such ruling by the Prophet (s.a.w), it must be more so for tobacco associated with smoking, and other emissions such as carbon monoxide associated with vehicles, chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and carbon dioxide associated with industries. Smoking is clearly prohibited by many Islamic jurists such as Al-Qardawi who said “it is physically, psychologically and economically harmful [in the sense that the tobacco industry results in a lost of time and money in treating the resulting diseases, and misuse of the land which could be used to plant a nutritious crop and so forth]” (p. 6). It is not only polluting the air but also harming the health of the smokers, people around
them and other environmental elements. As for other emissions from vehicles and factories, the activities must be subjected to a strict justification, and everyone should make the efforts to minimise them.

**Human Responsibility:**

There are two extreme views about the relationship between people and their environment (Tolu-e-Islam Movement, 2001):

[First,] nature is definitely hostile to man and takes a fiendish delight in bringing to naught his noblest enterprises … [Second,] nature is completely indifferent to man and his ideals. It simply does not care whether man succeeds or fails. Human history may well prove to be a brief episode in cosmic evolution. The earth may keep on rolling round the sun for ages after man has disappeared from its surface (p. 1).

The first implies that human and nature are two old enemies. In order for one to prevail the other must cease to exist. The latter implies that the relationship between humans and nature is simply no more than a cosmic cycle. The Qur’anic view on the relationship between people and the environment definitely does not resemble either of these two extremes. In the Qur’anic view, nature is friendly to humans, responsive to their intellect, and sympathetic to their moral endeavour because both humans and nature are created by Allah. Hence, fundamentally there is no conflict between them. Humans can live and develop only with the help of nature. By acquiring scientific knowledge humans can obtain this help from nature. Humans together with the help of nature must utilise this knowledge for the achievement of their moral ends in the light of Divine Guidance, not to merely pursuing the knowledge to satisfy the endless human imagination. The knowledge must be utilised for the benefit of humankind in accordance with values as laid down by Revelation (Tolu-e-Islam Movement, 2001).

Islamic environmental ethics clearly states that its view on the relation between humans and the environment is at the level of human needs, not human desires. Though the various components of the natural environment serve humanity as one of their functions, this does not mean that human use is the sole reason for their creation. Unfortunately, today what are most valued by many people are market value and profit, not the satisfaction of human religious and social needs. Therefore, resources are exploited not only for daily use but also to satisfy the desire for market value and profit. The level of daily needs has been upgraded to the level of market value to gain more profit. This attitude has resulted in a huge gap between the rich and the poor in the world today.

Humans may have been created with higher potential (Zaini Ujang, 1993a) than other creatures but other creatures too are worthy of respect and protection, though human beings are more worthy of charity if a choice must be made. All human relationships are to be based on justice and equity (Al-Qur’an, 16:90). The Qur’an points out that everything with Allah is measured (Al-Qur’an, 13:8). Thus, the balance of the universe (as symbolised by Qa’abah in Mecca) created by Allah must be preserved. The environment is not in the service of the present generation alone. Rather it is the gift of Allah to all ages, past, present and future (Al-Qur’an, 2:29) (Mawil, 1990).

The basic role of humans on earth is to worship God (Al-Qur’an, 51:56). To worship God means fulfilling all that God has demanded including all actions that the human being performs in accordance with the Islamic worldview. For example, the adoption of environmentally ethical behaviours (EEB) such as pre-cycling, re-use and recycling for the sake of God is an act of worshipping God and is rewarded in this life and the hereafter.

In Islam, human beings have two categories of responsibilities; individual and collectives. Human responsibility to Allah is not in any way fulfilled without fulfilling one’s responsibility towards one self, one’s family, and to the ‘community’ one lives in. Community here does not mean only the human community but includes the communities of other creatures as well (Al-Qur’an, 6:38). All of the resources created by God are put as a trust in human hands (Islam Set, 2004).

**Conclusion:**

The Qur’an and Sunnah as the sources of ethics in Islam – where Islamic environmental ethical codes have established – outlined the ethical behaviours involved in the interaction between human and its environment. The analyses of scientific literature revealed the supports for Islamic teachings on the environment that have been established in the Qur’an and Sunnah. The Qur’an has taught humans about the ethical way to interact with other humans and other elements of the environment. It has also prescribed the rewards and punishments due to good deeds and bad deeds towards the environment, respectively. Adopting environmentally ethical behaviour, for example, is considered in the Qur’an as a good deed. Islamic ethical principles, such as *halal* (lawful), *haram* (forbidden), *khilafah* (caliphate), moderation, no waste, no transgression, etc. taught in the Qur’an have provided a guide for human interactions with the environment including in providing guidance for developing the natural resources sustainably. Thus, the sustainable development concept and the environmental impact
assessments in development practices are considered good deeds in Islam. The analyses of the Qur'anic verses, Sunnah and the scientific literature revealed that Islam has prescribed Islamic environmental ethics as a guide for humans to interact with other humans, fauna (animals), flora (plants and trees), land and soil, water, and air. Islam has also prescribed the responsibility of humans towards the environment in that to consume the natural resources at the level of human needs not at the level of human desires.

Acknowledgement

This study is supported by UKM’s research grant UKM-DIPM-045-2011 Transformation in Environmental Concern: From Policy to Society-Driven.

Notes:

The English meaning of the Holy Qur’an used in this chapter is quoted from a translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali at the URL: http://www.islam101.com/quran/quran/Yusuf/quranYusuf.html (24/10/02)

References