
An Islamic Perspective on Environmental Stewardship: Lessons from the Quran and Sunnah Abdul Wakeel*

Abstract

Environmental pollution, intensified since the industrial revolution through rapid industrialization, deforestation, and unrestrained resource exploitation, poses severe threats to human, animal, and ecological health. Air, water, and soil contamination have disrupted climatic patterns, endangered biodiversity, and degraded life-support systems. A lot of effort is being made to improve the environment by reducing activities that generate pollutants, developing new technologies, and, most importantly, creating awareness to conserve natural resources. If we investigate population distribution, more than 50% of the global community believes in divine powers, one way or another. However, the inclusion of God's (Allah's) guidelines in mainstream scientific literature for environmental improvement is very rare. Therefore, seeking guidance from divine knowledge would be helpful not only to provide direction for new technologies but also to serve as a source of motivation for a large population worldwide. This article highlights the comprehensive environmental ethic embedded in the Quran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), offering timeless guidance for ecological preservation. The Islamic approach integrates spiritual accountability, recognizing humans as trustees of creation and holding them accountable to Allah for their stewardship of the environment. By applying these principles today, individuals, institutions, and governments can address modern ecological crises, restore environmental balance, and ensure the sustainable use of Earth's blessings for present and future generations. This prophetic environmental model offers a faith-based framework for global ecological reform.

Keywords: Environmental pollution, ecological ethics, Islamic conservation, spiritual accountability, sustainable development.

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Introduction

The advent of the Industrial Revolution, followed by the rapid establishment of diverse industries and the constant invention of faster modes of transportation, has made environmental protection a global concern over the past several decades. Environmental pollution has become a serious threat to human health and life. Certain parts of the land inhabited by humans have become so piled with filth and waste that the resulting stench has made life miserable. Disproportionate exploitation of forests and trees for industrial development has altered climatic patterns. The air we breathe has become so toxic due to emissions from factories, laboratories, and long queues of vehicles that humans are increasingly suffering from respiratory, pulmonary, liver, heart, and skin diseases. Animals and birds are also being affected, and new diseases are crossing geographical boundaries.

Even the ozone layer, which protects the Earth's atmosphere from the harmful effects of solar radiation, is being depleted, increasing the risks to human life daily. The water we drink, give to our livestock, and use to irrigate crops is becoming so contaminated with chemicals and toxic waste that both aquatic organisms and humans are being adversely affected, suffering from a variety of diseases. After spending a day in an industrial city, you can clearly notice the black residue of pollution on your clothes, body, mouth, and nose.

In addition to the reckless use of incendiary weapons in national and international wars, the use of chemical gases, explosives, and laser rays on a large scale is causing massive destruction. These weapons not only annihilate their targets but also have severe environmental impacts on nearby living beings and ecosystems. They poison the soil, disrupt plant growth, and raise temperatures, thereby disturbing the environmental balance.

Given this situation, the concerns of governments, international organizations, NGOs, and research institutions are fully justified. There is a growing campaign to protect the environment and

to control pollution to maintain clean air. Generally, people only realize the importance of preserving something when it threatens their health and existence. They worry about their eyes only when they hurt or seek treatment for pain in their limbs. In the same way, environmental reform and cleanliness are only now becoming a concern because pollution has spread, and people are suffering its toxic consequences. Therefore, it is necessary to address the concerns using the most authentic source of knowledge for humanity. Although this information is not new, it has never been compiled with the above-mentioned targets of the current era and global campaigns in mind.

The Comprehensive Teachings of the Last Prophet (peace be upon him)

Imagine a time 1400 years ago when there were no motor vehicles or massive factories. Forests weren't being destroyed, rivers weren't being poisoned, and pollution wasn't pervasive. But since Muhammad (peace be upon him) was the final messenger of Allah, and no prophet would come after him until the Day of Judgment, it was essential that through him, divine guidance be delivered for all future conditions and challenges. Without this, religion would be incomplete, and the command of entering Islam completely—ordained as the path to success in this world and the Hereafter—would remain unfulfilled (The Quran 2:208).

Thus, the final messenger, Muhammad (peace be upon him), gave comprehensive teachings and exhortations to keep the environment clean and free of pollution. Through foundational guidance, effective teachings, and practical measures, he ensured environmental purity. This universe is a beautiful gift from the Creator for humankind, and all living and non-living things within it are His gracious blessings. The Prophet (peace be upon him) not only taught the importance of maintaining the beauty and freshness of the environment but also urged exerting all efforts to protect it. He emphasized utilizing nature's gifts in accordance with natural laws so that humans may enjoy its

purity, benefit other creatures, and express gratitude to the Lord (Bsoul *et al.*, 2022).

Realizing the Gifts of the Creator

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) regarded the heavens, earth, seas, mountains, animals, plants, birds, forests, gardens, valleys, and human settlements as masterpieces of the Creator's balanced system. He taught reflection on their creation, recognition of the Divine wisdom within them, and the fulfillment of their due rights. He conveyed Allah's message to humankind in the Quran. The verse (The Quran, 2:164) mentions ten things directly related to the environment: 1) The sky, 2) The earth, 3) Day and night (i.e., time), 4) Navigation, 5) The utility of ships for humankind, 6) Rain, 7) The growth of vegetation and agriculture, 8) Animal life, 9) Circulation of winds, 10) Suspended clouds in the atmosphere.

These multifaceted environmental wonders and their relevance to human life and comfort are repeatedly emphasized in the Quran for observation, study, and reflection. This verse encourages understanding and benefiting from these signs, as they shape and balance our living environment.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) also made humanity aware that all these elements of the universe were created with precision, proportion, and balance for a meaningful purpose. In several verses, the Quran presents reflection on the order, balance, and set measures of creation as a means of recognizing truth. For example, it is stated in Al-Quran 'Indeed, it is Allah who splits the grain and the seed. He brings forth the living from the dead and brings forth the dead from the living. These are the wonders of Allah—so where are you being led astray? He brings forth the day from the veil of night and has made the night a time for rest. He has ordained the movement of the sun and the moon. These are the decrees of the Almighty, the All-Knowing' (The Quran, 6:95-96). At another place Allah says, "Glorify the Name of your Lord, the Highest, who created and proportioned, who

determined and guided, and who brought forth the vegetation" (The Quran, 87:1-4).

Do Not Disrupt the Balance of the Universe

Just as Allah established balance, proportion, and moderation in His creation, He commanded His servants to maintain the same in their actions and not to disturb the balance of His creation. Understanding this divine wisdom, using it as a guide in practice, linking it to our benefit, and preserving this balance is both a necessity and a duty. Allah says in Surah Rehman, "The sun and the moon move according to a precise calculation. And the stars and the trees prostrate. And the heaven—He raised it high and established the balance. So do not transgress the balance. Weigh with justice and do not give short measure. And the earth—He laid it out for all creatures. In it are fruits, date palms with sheathed clusters, and grains with husk and scented plants. Then which of the Favors of your Lord will you deny, O jinn and humankind?" (The Quran, 55:5-13).

This verse mentions the orderly orbits of the sun and moon, the lushness of plants, the elevated sky, the earth's formation, and the creation of fruits and grains—all as blessings bestowed upon humankind. It directs us to recognize these as part of a well-balanced, moderate system and warns against disrupting this divine arrangement. If one benefits from Allah's gifts in accordance with His laws, it leads to reform; deviation from these laws leads to corruption. Allah does not merely grant gifts but also provides guidance on their proper use.

Environmental Corruption

The Quran clearly and explicitly forbids causing corruption in the environment, "and do not cause corruption on the earth after it has been set right" (The Quran, 7:56). "Corruption" and "reform" are meaningful Quranic terms. "Reform" means to maintain the natural order, system, and balance created by Allah. "Corruption" means disrupting this natural arrangement and causing disorder. Allah placed everything in the universe with precision,

proportion, and purpose; we are commanded not to disturb it with careless actions. These resources are not to be used at our discretion but according to divine guidance. Disturbing this balance harms humanity itself, as stated “Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what people’s hands have earned, so that He may let them taste some of what they have done, that they might return (to righteousness)” (The Quran, 30:41).

Although this verse broadly addresses human rebellion, it specifically refers to environmental pollution on land and at sea caused by human misconduct. Pollution results not only from physical contamination but also from moral corruption and exploitation of natural resources. The solution lies in correcting our mindset and behavior toward the universe.

Prophetic Guidance on Environment

Alongside general principles, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also gave specific teachings on environmental protection. Even in the pre-industrial age, when pollution was minimal, he raised awareness and provided practical guidance that remains relevant today.

Do Not Spread Filth

One of the fundamental instructions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) regarding environmental protection is to avoid spreading filth, especially in public places. The Prophet (peace be upon him) prohibited defiling areas under shade, on pathways, and within mosques. Abu Huraira (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

“Avoid the two things that bring curses.”

The companions asked: “What are the two things?”

He (peace be upon him) replied:

“Relieving oneself in people’s paths and in shaded areas” (Sahih Muslim, Book 2, Hadith 85).

In the Prophet’s time, mosques were the primary form of public spaces, and he also forbade spitting in them (Sunan an-Nasa’i, Book 8, Hadith 36).

During the days of Eid al-Adha (sacrifice), large numbers of animals are slaughtered. Due to a lack of public awareness, the remains of sacrificed animals are often found on roads and in drains, spreading filth and diseases. Islamic teachings direct that such remains should be buried. Compliance with this instruction can significantly reduce pollution. The Shariah also prohibits using fuel that emits smoke into a neighbour’s house. This general principle serves as a foundation for regulating vehicle and factory emissions today.

Maintain Cleanliness and Purity

A major aspect of the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) environmental education was the importance of cleanliness—not only of the soul, body, clothes, and home, but also of the surrounding environment. The Quran praises the people of Quba in these words: “There are people in it (Masjid Quba) who love to be purified, and Allah loves those who purify themselves” (The Quran, 9:108).

The Prophet (peace be upon him) declared cleanliness a part of faith: “Cleanliness leads to faith, and faith leads its companion to Paradise” (Tabarani, 2015). Everyone desires Paradise. The Prophet (peace be upon him) taught that if you wish to enter Paradise, begin by making your environment clean and paradisiacal.

This Quranic and Prophetic guidance demands that every Muslim make efforts to keep their environment clean, lead cleanliness campaigns in their neighbourhoods, and ensure that carelessness does not lead to the spread of germs or air pollution. He should check whether trash near his home is causing trouble for others, and if so, his first focus should be on cleanliness.

Use Wisely, Avoid Waste

A third important aspect of the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) environmental message is the principle of “using as needed,” known today as conservation. Everything in the world has been made for human benefit, as Allah says, “Allah has

subjected for you all that is in the heavens and the earth” (The Quran, 45:13).

In another verse, Allah’s blessings are meant to be used with balance and propriety—not unnecessarily or excessively (The Quran, 67:15). The Quran gives this wise directive: “And He it is who produces gardens trellised and untrellised, and date palms, and crops of different shape and taste, and olives, and pomegranates, similar (in kind) and different (in taste). Eat their fruit when they ripen, and give their due on the day of harvest, and do not be wasteful. Indeed, He does not like the wasteful” (The Quran, 6:141).

The message is further reinforced, “And eat and drink, but do not be excessive. Indeed, Allah does not like those who exceed limits” (The Quran, 7:31).

If this principle, “Use, not excess,” is applied consistently, issues of environmental imbalance and pollution can be addressed within a reasonable time. Whether its water, forests, animals, energy, or food resources, conservation ensures sustainability. Everyone, including government, institutions, and individuals, is accountable to this divine command.

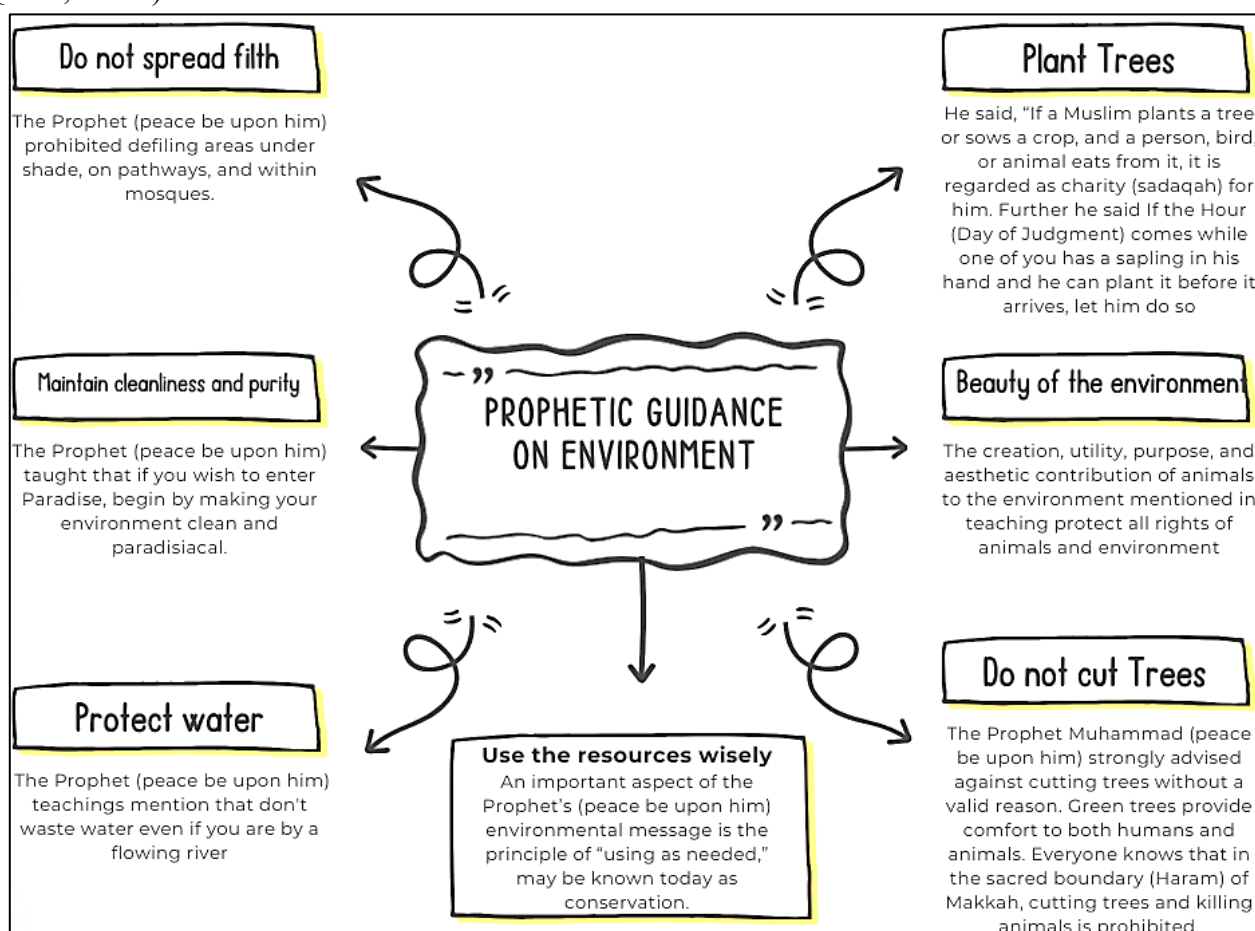


Figure 1. An info graphic summarizing Islamic teachings from Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) related to environmental ethics and sustainability (Self-created).

Protect Water

Among the blessings and essential resources granted by Allah, water holds a fundamental and precious place. Human life depends heavily on

water. Due to its overuse and pollution, the environment faces serious threats. From the Quranic perspective, water is not just a necessity but the

very foundation of life. Allah says, “We made every living thing from water” (The Quran, 21:30).

In another place, Allah says, “Allah created every living being from water” (The Quran, 24:45).

It is a human responsibility to keep water in its natural state and to use it with care, so that its life-giving capacity is preserved. Aquatic organisms must survive, and people, animals, and plants that rely on water must continue to benefit from it.

Abdullah ibn Amr (may Allah be pleased with him) reports that the Prophet (peace be upon him) once passed by Sa’d (may Allah be pleased with him) while he was performing ablution and using too much water. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “What is this extravagance, Sa’d?” Sa’d asked: “Is there extravagance even in ablution?” The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: “Yes, even if you are by a flowing river” (Sunan Ibn Majah, Book 1, Hadith 425). This teaches us to use water prudently and to prevent its pollution. The Prophet (peace be upon him) also forbade defiling water sources:

Jabir ibn Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “The Messenger of Allah forbade urinating in stagnant water” (Jadoon *et al.*, 2023).

Animals Are the Beauty of the Environment

Animals, like humans, are the creation of Allah and part of the environment. They serve human needs and enhance the beauty of our surroundings. Allah created them for our use and benefit. Therefore, protecting their species and ensuring their care are human obligations. Allah says, “And He created the cattle for you. In them, there is warmth and numerous benefits, and you eat from them. And you find beauty in them when you bring them home in the evening and take them out to pasture in the morning. And they carry your loads to distant lands which you could not reach except with great hardship. Indeed, your Lord is Most Kind, Most Merciful. And [He also created] horses, mules, and donkeys for you to ride and as adornment. And He creates what you do not know” (The Quran, 16:5-8). This verse provides a powerful

basis for wildlife conservation. It highlights the creation, utility, purpose, and aesthetic contribution of animals to the environment. Especially in societies where herding is central to the economy, the scene of animals leaving in the morning for pastures and returning at dusk is a source of human joy.

Do Not Cut Trees Without Reason

Trees, plants, forests, and gardens play a vital role in making the environment pleasant and in maintaining a moderate climate. Where greenery thrives, humans feel relaxed; where it is absent, there is a sense of suffocation. That’s why people prefer to visit beautiful green landscapes for recreation. Thus, environmental care demands that trees not be cut needlessly, lest we invite climatic disasters.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) strongly advised against cutting trees without a valid reason. Green trees provide comfort to both humans and animals. Everyone knows that in the sacred boundary (Haram) of Makkah, cutting trees and killing animals is prohibited. When the Prophet (peace be upon him) arrived in Madinah, he said: “Just as Ibrahim (peace be upon him) declared Makkah a sanctuary, I declare Madinah a sanctuary where no tree should be cut nor animal killed (without need), except for firewood and fodder” (Samhudi, 2008). Even in war, where many unethical practices are adopted to overpower the enemy, the Prophet (peace be upon him) forbade the cutting of trees without necessity.

Plant Trees

Greening the environment, moderating the climate, and serving human and animal needs all depend on planting trees. The Prophet (peace be upon him) emphasized this importance. Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “If a Muslim plants a tree or sows a crop, and a person, bird, or animal eats from it, it is regarded as charity (sadaqah) for him” (Maududi, 1976).

The Prophet (peace be upon him) stressed the importance of planting even at the end of time. Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “If the Hour (Day of Judgment) comes while one of you has a sapling in his hand and he can plant it before it arrives, let him do so” (Foltz *et al.*, 2003).

This shows the ultimate importance of environmental protection through tree plantation. Even in the face of the end of the world, planting a tree is an act of faith and responsibility.

A Practical Example by Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) was not like world leaders who give orders without following them; rather, he practically led by himself. On several occasions, he planted trees with his own hands, and they grew and flourished.

About 20 miles from Madinah lies the valley of Aqiq. There, the Prophet (peace be upon him) designated a grazing area for horses known as Hima al-Naqi'. He had trees and vegetables planted there. Over time, the valley turned green, and trees grew tall enough to hide a rider on horseback in their shade. This pasture became a recreational area as well. The Prophet (peace be upon him) marked its boundary by asking a man to climb a palm tree and shout-the area where the voice could be heard marked the boundary. Such teachings and examples from the Prophet (peace be upon him) serve as inspiration and guidance for today's environmental scientists, organizations, and policymakers.

Responsibility and Accountability

The most important part of the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) teaching is that he instilled a deep sense of responsibility and accountability in people. He (peace be upon him) urged humans to use the blessings of the heavens, the earth, and the environment with a sense of duty. If one fails to fulfill this responsibility, even if neither the government nor society holds them

accountable in this world, they will certainly be answerable before Allah on the Day of Judgment.

As the Quran declares: “Then, on that Day, you will surely be asked about the blessings (you enjoyed)” (The Quran, 102:8).

Conclusion

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the recent global campaign present the collective responsibility of humanity for this earth, and Islam has provided a comprehensive ideology for applying these SDGs more than 1400 years ago (Ansari *et al.*, 2021)

It is, therefore, imperative that all Muslims—and indeed all humans—adhere to the principle of using Allah's blessings as needed, protecting them from waste, corruption, and destruction. This includes water, land, air, animals, plants, and every resource that contributes to life and health. We must protect them for ourselves, for future generations, and to fulfill the trust that the Creator has placed upon us.

Only by reviving this prophetic environmental ethic can we restore balance to our surroundings and find a path out of the environmental crises we face today.

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