

## **The Prophet** (Peace be upon him) **and the Environment**

Our discussion about the environment in the Prophet's life (Peace be upon him) must be preceded by juristic and linguistic subtleties. Juristically speaking, Islamic legislation imposes some measures and restrictions in every aspect of a Muslim's life, and a Muslim has to adapt every development of his age to such measures and restrictions. This includes respecting the human mind that Allah the Almighty has given him; in addition to trusting his ability of extracting the rulings that would amend his affairs. So, for example; no one can say that the Prophet (Peace be upon him) did not prohibit throwing chemical waste into rivers; because the Prophet (Peace be upon him) prohibited urinating and excreting in stagnant water as this was the then most prevailing water polluting factor. Therefore, banning such actions automatically entails all new means of pollution which were not present at that time.

The linguistic subtlety is that the Qur'an and Sunna did not use the same words to express the environmental terms that are used by those currently therewith. Yet, they expressed them by using other strong evidential words. Hence, the Qur'an and Sunna did not mention words such as "pollution" or "environmental balance", but this does not mean that Islamic law did not tackle these two cases. This is because the Noble Qur'an expresses pollution; for example,

by using words such as “corruption”, and gives a lot of warnings about this.

In addition, it dispraises the “corruptors” who make mischief in the land and reform not”, and the Qur’an and Sunna mention these things very often. This is because corruption is more comprehensive than pollution as it also refers to material as well as moral corruption. This would include corruption of manners and the spread of immorality. Further, the Qur’an refers to the “environmental balance” by the word “balance”, as Allah the Almighty is the One who “set up the scale” and prohibited people from transgressing (due) balance and that they fall not short in the balance. However, the first one is more fluent and is stronger than the second one in terms of evidence. Also, Islam expresses the idea of environmental balance by using words such as ‘amount’ and ‘estimation’ as Allah the Almighty created everything by proportion and measure as perfectly as it would ever be. However, the term “environment” did not appear in either the Qur’an or the Sunna, but Islam expresses this notion by talking about the elements of the environment such as the sky, the earth, the land, the sea, and about minerals such as iron.

If we understand these two subtleties, it will not be difficult for us to extract from the texts of the Qur’an and Sunna the detailed orders about caring for and maintaining the environment. Similarly, we could extract analyses of the cases which disturb those who are

concerned with environmental matters in the world and extracting detailed solutions for them.

The prophetic Sunnah was greatly concerned with planting and cultivating. Relevant cases are myriad. Al-Bukhari and Muslim narrated on the authority of Anas who said, Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "If any Muslim plants any plant and a human being or an animal eats of it, he will be rewarded as if he had given that much in charity". The meaning of this tradition is included in many other traditions.

Ahmad and Al-Bukhari in his book titled *al-'Adab al-Mufrad* narrated on the authority of Anas who said, Allah's Messenger (Peace be upon him) said, "If it is the Day of Judgment and there is a *faseelah* (seed or sapling) in your hand, if you can plant it before the Day of Judgment starts then you should (go on and) plant it."

No other tradition encourages tree-planting as strongly as this one. It seems as if it was a call that work has to be meaningful in itself and not just a means, because in this case the one who owns the plant will not eat from it and no one else will eat as the Day of judgment is about to begin. Yet, the work should be done as an act of worship.

The Qur'an and Sunna ordered us to dwell in the land. However, dwelling in the land is a general term that includes planting

it, establishing factories and residences on it, and other things which bring about benefit to humanity and use thereof. Allah the Almighty said in His Book by His Prophet Saleh, “He created you from the Earth and settled you therein.” (Hud, 11 : 61) This order is one of the purposes of the creation of man.

Hence, the Prophet (Peace be upon him) rewarded the one who revives barren or unused lands. Moreover, the Prophet (Peace be upon him) said about the one who revives barren land that it should be given to him.

At-Termidhi, Abu Dawoud, Al-Nasa’i and others reported on the authority of Sa’id ibn Zaid (May Allah be pleased with them) the Prophet (Peace be upon him) as saying, “Whoever revitalizes dead (disused) land, it becomes his.” In another narration of Al-Bukhari on the authority of ‘Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) said, “He who inhabits a no man's land, he shall have claim to it.”

'Umar ibn al-Khattab (May Allah be pleased with him) understood this, and he banned people from taking land without using it. He said to Belal ibn Rabah, who was given the land of Al-‘Aqiq by Allah’s Messenger (Peace be upon him), “Allah’s Messenger (Peace be upon him) did not give you this piece of land to keep it from people. He gave it to you in order to work. So, take that which you can revive and leave the rest”.

The Qur'anic and prophetic orders also came to preserve resources and prevent people from wasting them. The following are some Qur'anic verses that deal with this issue: “*Do no mischief on the earth, after it hath been set in order*” (chapter of Al-A'raf, 7: 56, 85), “*and do no evil nor mischief on the (face of the) earth*”(Al-Baqarah, 2:60), “*and refrain from evil and mischief on the earth.*” (Al-A'raf, 7:74), “*And Allah loves not those who do mischief*” (Al-Ma'idah, 5:64), and “*And Allah loves not mischief*” (Al-Baqarah, 2: 205).

There are many other verses that refer to the same issue. Hence, corruption on earth may be material by means of sabotage, polluting or damaging, or it may be abstract through moral corruption and spreading immorality. By analogy, the prophetic orders came to save resources and wealth. If we talk about the Qur'anic and prophetic orders to save livestock, we will find that the orders to save them came with inspiring and disheartening contexts. In the chapter of Al-An'am, Allah the Almighty says “*And they say that such and such cattle and crops are taboo, and none should eat of them except those whom - so they say - We wish; further, there are cattle forbidden to yoke or burden, and cattle on which, (at slaughter), the name of Allah is not pronounced; - inventions against Allah's name: soon will He requite them for their inventions*”(chapter of Al-An'am, 6:138). The verse includes a strong threat to the one who idles the livestock and prevents people from making use of it.

It was narrated by Al Nasa'i and Ahmed through Al-Sharid al-Thaqafi (May Allah Have Mercy upon him) that the Prophet (Peace be upon him) said: "Whoever kills a bird for play, it will come to Allah on the Day of Judgment saying: O my Lord, so-and-so killed me for playing, not for interest".

Al-Bukhari and Muslim narrated of Abu Hurairah (May Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (Peace be upon him) said: "A sick animal should not be kept at the same place with a sound one." This is an order to save animals by separating the sick from the healthy.

In addition, Muslim narrated on the authority of Abu Hurairah that the Prophet (Peace be upon him) stayed with a man and the man wanted to host him generously by slaughtering a goat. Then the Prophet (Peace be upon him) said to him: "Stay away from the one that gives milk". This bans slaughtering the one that gives milk because this stops people from benefitting from it.

Also, Al-Bukhari and Muslim narrated that the Prophet (Peace be upon him) saw a dead goat and ordered his companions to make use of its skin, despite being dead and forbidden to be eaten. Those traditions clarify how careful the Prophet (Peace be upon him) was to save livestock.

If we speak about agricultural wealth, we find the Prophet's (Peace be upon him) tradition narrated by Abu Dawoud and authenticated

by Al-Albani on the authority of 'Abd Allah ibn al-Habashy (May Allah Have Mercy upon him) reads: “If anyone cuts a lote-tree, Allah will bring him heading into Hell”. This is a strong threat for the one who unjustly cuts down trees.

There are a few examples when cutting down trees is permissible. One such example is during times of war, as in the Battle of Banu An-Nadir. The Prophet (Peace be upon him) ordered that some trees to be cut down where disbelievers were hiding. It seems as if they said that the Prophet (Peace be upon him) allowed what he had previously disallowed. So, the noble Qur’anic verses were revealed in the chapter of Al-Hashr: “*Whether ye cut down (O you Muslim!) The tender palm-trees, or you left them standing on their roots, it was by leave of Allah, and in order that He might cover with shame the rebellious transgresses*”59:5)

Dear reader, you should notice the Prophet (Peace be upon him) understood how to save the environment. His enemies were astonished when he cut down some trees due to the necessity of war and jihad.

If we speak about how the Prophet (Peace be upon him) saved water, we will find that he prohibited urinating or excreting in stagnant water; for such were the then most water polluting acts. This ban includes all coeval pollutants. Abu Dawoud, Ibn Majah and others – Al-Albani authenticated this tradition – reported on the authority of

Mu'az ibn Jabal that the Prophet (Peace be upon him) said: "Be on your guard against two things which provoke cursing. They (the hearers) said: Prophet of Allah, what are these things which provoke cursing? He said: Easing in thoroughfares (where people walk) or under the shade (of the trees) (where they take shelter and rest). Abu Dawoud, Ibn Majah, and others - Al-Albani authenticated this tradition – reported through Mu'az ibn Jabal that the Prophet (Peace be upon him) said: "No one should urinate in stagnant water nor should he bathe therein".

Many traditions were reported with the same meaning. Abu Dawoud – authenticated by Al-Albani – reported on the authority of 'Abd Allah ibn Moghafal who said: "I heard Allah's messenger (Peace be upon him) as saying: "There will be some of my nation who will transgress in purification and supplication". This tradition clearly bans wasting water even if it was for the sake of the lawful cleanliness that Allah ordered. This is what Abu Dawoud understood when he narrated the tradition under "Wasting Water".

Thus, the Noble Qur'an told us that corruption on land and sea is the responsibility of humans and the result of what they have done. It calls to avoid and stop anything that causes this corruption as Allah the Almighty says, "*Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of (the meed) that the hands of men have earned, that (Allah) may give them a taste of*

*some of their deeds: in order that they may turn back (from Evil) ”. (Ar- Rum. 30: 41)*

Those who are concerned with the environment should know that the prophetic guidance orders Muslims to save the environmental balance and bans mass killing of creatures created by Allah the Almighty, because all things were created with wisdom. Moreover, mass killing of any creatures results in environmental disorder. This is the case, even with creatures that people generally dislike, such as insects.

Abu Dawoud, Al-Termidhi, Al-Nasa’i and others reported on the authority of ‘Aisha (May Allah be Pleased with her) the Prophet (Peace be upon him) as saying: “Were dogs not a species of creature I should command that they all be killed; but kill every purely black one.”

Al-Bukhari reported on the authority of Abu Hurairah (May Allah be pleased with him) himself as saying: ‘I heard Allah’s messenger (Peace be upon him) say: “An ant stung one of the prophets, then he ordered an ant hill to be destroyed, so Allah revealed to him: “Would you kill a nation glorifying Allah because of one ant?” And, in another narration, “It is only one ant”’.

This tradition means that if he only killed the ant which stung him while leaving others, he would not have been blamed. Yet, as he

got angry and killed many, this caused Allah the Almighty to blame him. Some scholars also understood this meaning, as when Allah Exalted is He, ordered His Prophet Noah to board the Ark. He did not allow him to forget the other creatures; yet, He ordered him to take a male and a female of each on board the Ark. The following are some of the Qur'anic verses mentioning this divine order to Noah: *“So We inspired him (with this message): "Construct the Ark within Our sight and under Our guidance: then when comes Our Command, and the fountains of the earth gush forth, take thou on board pairs of every species, male and female, and thy family- except those of them against whom the Word has already gone forth”* (Al- Muminun, 23:27).

So, from the preceding information, we can understand that the prophetic vision of saving the environment has three principles:

The first one is the factor of obtaining benefit, as Islam calls mankind to make use of and save environmental elements to ensure sustainability. Among the most important things proving this meaning is what Al-Nasa'i and Ahmad narrated through Al-Shareed al-Thaqafi (May Allah have mercy upon him) that the Prophet (Peace be upon him) said: “Whoever kills a bird for playing, it will come to Allah on the Day of Judgment saying: O my Lord, so-and-so killed me for playing and not for interest”.

The second one is the factor of beauty, as Muslim and others narrated on the authority of ‘Abd Allah ibn Mas’ud that the Prophet (Peace be upon him) said: “Allah is beautiful and loves beauty”. This was also clarified in many Qur’anic verses. Allah the Almighty described plants in many verses of His Book, like, “Gardens of Joy” and described the pairs of plants as “A joyful pair”. Moreover, Allah the Almighty not only ordered us to eat plants, but also to look at them; “*Feast your eyes on the fruits and ripeness thereof.*” (Al-An’am, 7: 99). This is to enjoy looking at their beauty and admit the blessing of Allah on us.

The third one is a purely moral point, as the Prophet (Peace be upon him) taught us that the existing creatures in environment are nations like us that glorify Allah; and this necessitates their protection, i.e., not to damage or kill them except for considered interests. We understood this from the tradition narrated by Al Bukhari on the authority of Abu Hurairah (May Allah Have Mercy upon him) saying: ‘I heard Allah’s Messenger (Peace be upon him) say: “An ant stung one of the prophets, then he ordered an ant hill to be destroyed, so Allah revealed to him: “Would you kill a nation glorifying Allah because of one ant?”’ This meaning also exists in the Noble Qur’an in Allah’s saying: “*There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth, nor a being that flies on its wings, but (forms part of) communities like you*” (Al-An’am, 6:38). And, also in His saying: “*Do you not see that to Allah prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth and the*

*sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the moving creatures and many of the people? But upon many the punishment has been justified” (Al-Hajj, 22: 18).*

These noble verses and others point at man as being one of the elements of the *environment*. Thus, he has to save the other elements and should not damage them. Allah the Almighty tells us in other verses that He, Glorified is He, subjected the other environmental factors, such as the sun, moon, animals, and others for man’s service. Hence, this imposes on man the responsibility to save them and maintain them in order to thank Allah the Almighty for His blessing.