

Faith Inspired Activism & Environmental Justice

An Islamic Perspective - By Kamran Shezad

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

“If the Hour (the day of Resurrection) is about to be established and one of you was holding a seedling, let him take advantage of even one second before the Hour is established to plant it.”
(Al-Adab Al-Mufrad)

As Muslims, we never give up on life. Even if we're told there's no hope, we continue to provide people with the best of care to help their health improve. We should behave no differently towards our planet, our Creator has given us this *Amanah* (trust) and we must continue to show care, compassion and fight for her justice. This beautiful opening quote from our Prophet ﷺ above contains a clear instruction that regardless of what we may think is about to happen, we must continue to play our role and fulfil our duties. This narration can be used in various contexts but is very pertinent to today's climate change challenges. Activism and campaigning for climate justice should be seen as an act of *Ibaadah* (worship).

Allah Almighty says:

“Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned so He may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done that perhaps they will return [to righteousness].” Surah Rum (30:41)

In this verse, Allah Almighty is asking us to 'reflect' and is telling us that if we reflect on the consequences we are facing, we have the ability to change things and return to better times. 'Reflection' is described as a process that helps turn experience into knowledge and involves thought and exploration of a concept or event. It is a form of problem solving that is used to resolve issues, and involves the careful consideration of a current practice, based on available knowledge and beliefs. The Quran is in effect a coaching manual and it coaches us on how to take action on one of the most important issues humanity is currently facing: climate change.

One of the biggest Sunnahs of our Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is that of 'struggle'. Our Prophet is the best of creation, most beloved to Allah Almighty, yet he faced intense hardship and difficulties. Success was not always easy or instant during the lifetime of the Prophet. This is a lesson for us all: to achieve something important we must work hard and fight for what we believe in. Ultimately, Allah Almighty is the One who can change a situation. Our Prophet ﷺ would constantly stand up for the rights of the oppressed and would call for justice; he in fact called on all of us to take action:

“When any of you sees an injustice/evil let him change it with his hand. If he is not able to do so, then let him change it with his tongue. And if he is not able to do so then let him hate it with his heart though that is the least of his faith” (Sahih Muslim).

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ inherited substantial societal problems such as infanticide, slavery, misogyny, materialism and so much more. However, instead of shying away from his responsibilities, he accepted and worked through them without hesitation. Climate change, although a very recent occurrence, is not just an environmental problem: it is also one of the greatest threats the world has ever faced. Sea levels are rising, oceans are becoming warmer, longer and more intense droughts threaten crops, wildlife and freshwater. Our planet's already diminishing diversity is at further risk due to the changing climate.

Climate change affects different people and places inconsistently. Therefore this leads to inequalities within and across nations, as well as between current and future generations, and this is climate injustice. Poorer

countries although least responsible for the effects of climate change are suffering the most from its devastating effects in particular with food insecurity, water scarcity and loss of biodiversity.

In the above hadith, we are clearly being told that it is incumbent upon Muslims to stand up against all forms of injustice and that includes standing up for establishing climate justice. It is not enough for us to be sad about the devastation being caused across the planet. To please our Lord and Creator, we must convert our feelings of sorrow, anger and guilt into something more meaningful which brings about systemic change.

"Seek Me amongst the downtrodden, verily you are given your substance as well as Divine aid, owing to your treatment of your downtrodden" (Tirmidhi).

The impacts of climate change are primarily affecting many of the world's poorest people, those who Allah Almighty and the Prophet ﷺ love. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would have dedicated himself to their service, so as a Muslim community we should also have that love so we can keep this prophetic ethos alive.

"Be a community that calls for what is good, urges what is right and forbids what is wrong. Those who do, are the successful ones" - (Quran 3:104)

As Muslims, we should be exemplars, leading the wider community in addressing various injustices. Failure to do so could be calamitous for the world. Amongst those potential consequences is losing the assistance of Allah Almighty in our affairs and in our sustenance:

*"...Allah Almighty does not change the condition of people unless they change what is in themselves".
(Quran 13:11)*

Advocating for change is not an easy task, it requires courage to engage in campaigning for action, particularly with the issues surrounding climate change. Unfortunately, materialism, capitalism, fake news, apathy and many other factors are major obstacles on this journey. Environmental protection is not high on the agenda within our community, nor is it taken as seriously as it should be in politics. It is far from easy to stand up to the status quo or to go against the policies of the government and authorities.

We can however take inspiration from the story of Prophet Musa (as) as described in *Surah Ash- Shu'ara (26:10-15)* who learnt to overcome fears and to confront the challenges that needed to be faced. Allah Almighty commanded Prophet Musa to go to Fir'awn, knowing full well the political power and the heartless strength that lay with Fir'awn. Prophet Musa (as) confessed his concerns to Allah Almighty and made supplication before continuing. Whilst there is no intention here to compare our communities or authorities with that of the ruthless Fir'awn, it is important to highlight the key principle of having belief and confidence in Allah Almighty in all matters.

In Islam, the root of faith is to believe in Allah Almighty as the only deity worthy of worship and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah Almighty. Acknowledging the supremacy of Allah Almighty in both human and environmental affairs is essential for the accomplishment of our activism. Perhaps the secret power of this truth is hidden in the Fatiha prayer we recite at least ten times a day 'You alone we worship, and in You alone we seek help' for were we truly live this truth, there would be no doubt, no fear, no discouragement. Committing our actions for the sake of Allah Almighty, knowing everything is in His Hands, we can freely act against injustice without worry or despair as to the likely results, making our affair purely for our Compassionate and Merciful Lord.

"You who believe, uphold justice and bear witness to God, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives. Whether the person is rich or poor, God can best take care of both. Refrain from following your own desire, so that you can act justly- if you distort or neglect justice, God is fully aware of what you do. (Quran 4:135)