

# Contents

Introduction	5
1. Environmentalism and Sustainability in Islam	7
2. Beginnings: Mud and Stone	12
3. Cave Dwellings	19
4. Courtyard Houses	22
5. The Marsh Arabs	25
6. Yurts: Central Asian Circular Tents	30
7. The Bedouin Tent	33
8. The <i>Qanat</i> Water Supply System	36
9. <i>Norias</i> : Islamic Water Wheels	40
10. Islamic Gardens	46
11. Islamic Windmills	52
12. <i>Bâdgîrs</i> : Islamic Air Conditioners	56
13. <i>Mashrabbiyahs</i> : Islamic Air Conditioners	60
14. <i>Yakhchâls</i> : Islamic Refrigerators	64
15. Pigeon Towers: Organic Fertilizer Factories	67
16. The Multipurpose Date Palm	71
17. The Blessed Olive Tree	75
18. Sun-Dried Fruits and Vegetables	80
19. Calabashes: Gorgeous Gourds	85
20. The First 'Green Campuses'	89
21. Fog Harvesting	94
22. <i>Baira</i> : Floating Gardens	98
23. 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Environmentalism	102
Glossary	107
Comprehension Questions	111
Select Bibliography	126

# Introduction

﴿إِنَّ الْأَرْضَ لِلَّهِ ...﴾ الأعراف: ١٢٨

“Verily, the earth is Allah’s ...” *Al-A’raf: 128*

The relationship between man and his environment is stated very clearly in the Qur’an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Islam has never viewed the wondrous natural world as an untamed wilderness that needed to be controlled. Conversely, Muslims are encouraged to respect nature and to marvel at the signs of the Creator visible in the world around them. Allah’s creation is like an open book inviting all of mankind to observe His signs and reflect. Indeed, approximately one eighth of the Noble Qur’an exhorts believers to reflect on nature.

﴿إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ﴾ النحل: ٦٩

“... Verily, in this is a sign for people who think.” *An-Nahl: 69*

Because of man’s unique ability to reason, Allah has entrusted him as custodian (*khalâif al-‘ardh*) of His creation, earth. Muslims are admonished to live in harmony with their natural surroundings.

﴿إِنَّا عَرَضْنَا الْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْجِبَالِ فَأَبَيْنَ أَنْ يَحْمِلْنَهَا وَأَشْفَقْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا الْإِنْسَانُ﴾ الأحزاب: ٧٢

“Verily, We did offer the trust or moral responsibility to the heavens and the earth, and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and were afraid of it. But man bore it.” *Al-Ahzâb: 72*



﴿وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً﴾ البقرة: ٣٠

“And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels: ‘Verily, I am about to establish on earth one who shall inherit it.’ *Al-Baqarah*: 30

Use of the earth’s vast resources is not unconditional. Unfortunately, our world today is suffering from catastrophic environmental problems. This is the direct result of man’s irresponsibility and mistaken belief that all of creation belongs to him and he can act with impunity in interacting with it. Mankind has over exploited these resources and has consequently created a frightening ecological imbalance. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the wanton destruction caused to our natural world is only too apparent. Can man truly love his Creator in Heaven, if he shows no respect for His creation on earth? So, we must ask ourselves how wise and ethical a species we *Homo sapiens* really are!

To correct this imbalance, man must first reorient himself by submitting to his Creator and living a life in pious awe and gratitude. Only then can we begin to care for the planet given to us by Allah and rectify the damage done to it.

Over the past fourteen centuries, Muslims have honoured the trust bestowed on them by Allah. Being custodians of this beautiful earth, Islamic societies dutifully established a harmonious and sustainable relationship with their environment.

This book is meant to be a celebration of the ingenuity of Allah’s *khalâif al-‘ardh* (custodians of His earth) – across the length and breadth of *Dâr al-Islâm* – in developing ‘green’, eco-friendly, and sustainable technologies. They are all simple, practical and ‘doable’. They are traditional technologies of great intrinsic beauty reflecting an Islamic identity in tune with its natural environment. And they can still offer inspiration as we struggle to create a greener future for us all.

To you all, my warmest salaams.

Luqman Nagy  
Dhahran, Saudi Arabia  
March 2010



# Chapter 1 Environmentalism and Sustainability in Islam

﴿لَخَلْقُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ خَلْقِ النَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾ غافر: ٥٧

“The creation of the heavens and the earth is indeed greater than the creation of mankind; yet, most of mankind knows not.” *Ghâfir: 57*

## THE PROPHET'S ﷺ MESSAGE

A template for reconnecting with nature and for solving our self-destructive environmental problems can be found in the message of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ who offered mankind the best example of how to live one's life. His example was a 'green' one which showed how man and his environment were interdependent. It is a pre-modern lifestyle for today's modern world. He encouraged simplicity, moderation and compassion and I believe these alone may be the key to our success in coping with all future environmental issues. The Prophet ﷺ once said:

«الرَّاحِمُونَ يَرْحَمُهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ، ارْحَمُوا مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَرْحَمَكُمُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ.»  
(سنن الترمذي)

“The Compassionate One has mercy on those who are merciful. If you show mercy on those who are on earth, He who is in heaven will show mercy on you.” (*Al-Tirmidhi*)

The desecration of nature and the over exploitation of the earth's natural resources have been caused by greed and an unquenchable thirst for power and wealth. Man is also guilty of excessive waste,

**O**ur air, water and soil are being polluted at unprecedented rates. Forests are being destroyed along with their irreplaceable ecosystems. As the world's population approaches seven billion, many large urban centres are becoming almost uninhabitable. We are daily reminded of such concerns on the television and radio and in newspapers. So, just how sustainable is our 21<sup>st</sup> century lifestyle?

Most will agree that our environment is under threat because of the excessive, uncensored and selfish exploitation of the world's natural resources which has occurred over the past two centuries. Although much of the damage already done is irreversible, attempts are being made to minimize the effects of some environmental problems. Today, environmentalism, the active campaign to preserve restore or improve the natural environment, is not a passing fad, but a fact of life.

Environmentalists are attempting to address the imbalance that is creating such havoc in the natural world and no inhabitant of our fragile earth can afford to be impartial to their cause.















