

Water in Islam

Water is the primary element

Qur'an 11:7

"And it is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and his Throne was upon water."

Life-giving quality of water

Qur'an 16:65

"And Allah has sent down the water from the sky and therewith gives life to the earth after its death."

Qur'an 67:30

"Say: if your stream be some morning lost, who then can supply you with clear flowing water?"

Qur'an 25:48

"He sends down saving rain for them when they have lost all hope and spreads abroad His mercy."

Qur'an 21:107

"In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, and the ships that run in the sea with that which benefits mankind, and the water that Allah sends down from the sky, then gives life with it to the earth after its death and spreads in it all (kinds of) animals, and the changing of the winds and the clouds made subservient between heaven and earth, there are surely signs for a people who understand."

Every life is made of water

Qur'an 21:30

"We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?"

Qur'an 24:45

"And Allah has created every animal of water. So among them is that which crawls on its belly, and among them is that which walks on two feet, and among them is that which walks on four."

Water supply is fixed and should not be wasted

Qur'an 40:18

"And we send water from the sky in fixed measure."

Qur'an 7:31



O Children of Adam!... Eat and drink: But waste not by excess, for God loveth not the wasters."

Qur'an 23:18

"And We send down water from the sky according to [due] measure and We cause it to soak in the soil; and We certainly are able to drain it off".

God can withhold water from the people

Qur'an 56:68-70

"Consider the water which you drink. Was it you that brought it down from the rain cloud or We? If We had pleased, We could make it bitter."

Distribution of water

English Translation of Holy Hadith (Sahih Bukhari) by M. Muhsin Khan, Volume 3, Book 40, Number 541

"Narrated Sahl bin Sad: A tumbler (full of milk or water) was brought to the Prophet who drank from it, while on his right side there was sitting a boy who was the youngest of those who were present and on his left side there were old men. The Prophet asked, "O boy, will you allow me to give it (i.e. the rest of the drink) to the old men?" The boy said, "O Allah's Apostle! I will not give preference to anyone over me to drink the rest of it from which you have drunk." So, the Prophet gave it to him".

English Translation of Holy Hadith (Sahih Bukhari) by M. Muhsin Khan, Volume 3, Book 40, Number 542

"Narrated Az-Zuhri: Anas bin Malik said, that once a domestic sheep was milked for Allah's Apostle while he was in the house of Anas bin Malik. The milk was mixed with water drawn from the well in Anas's house. A tumbler of it was presented to Allah's Apostle who drank from it. Then Abu Bakr was sitting on his left side and a bedouin on his right side. When the Prophet removed the tumbler from his mouth, 'Umar was afraid that the Prophet might give it to the bedouin, so he said, "O Allah's Apostle! Give it to Abu Bakr who is sitting by your side." But the Prophet gave it to the bedouin, who was to his right and said, "You should start with the one on your right side."

English Translation of Holy Hadith (Sahih Bukhari) by M. Muhsin Khan, Volume 3, Book 40, Number 543

"Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah's Apostle said, "Do not withhold the superfluous water, for that will prevent people from grazing their cattle."

English Translation of Holy Hadith (Sahih Bukhari) by M. Muhsin Khan, Volume 3, Book 40, Number 544

"Narrated Abu Huraira: that Allah's Apostle said, "Do not withhold the superfluous water in order to withhold the superfluous grass."

English Translation of Holy Hadith (Sahih Bukhari) by M. Muhsin Khan, Volume 3, Book 40, Number 547

"Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah's Apostle said, "There are three persons whom Allah will not look at on the Day of Resurrection, nor will he purify them and theirs shall be a severe punishment. They are:
1. A man possessed superfluous water, on a way and he withheld it from travelers.
2. A man who gave a pledge of allegiance to a ruler and he gave it only for worldly benefits. If the ruler gives him something he gets satisfied, and if the ruler withholds something from him, he gets dissatisfied.
3. And man displayed his goods for sale after the 'Asr prayer and he said, 'By Allah, except Whom None has the right to be worshipped, I have been given so much for my goods,' and somebody believes him (and buys them)."
The Prophet then recited: "Verily! Those who purchase a little gain at the cost of Allah's Covenant and their oaths." (3.77)

English Translation of Holy Hadith (Sahih Bukhari) by M. Muhsin Khan, Volume 3, Book 40, Number 548



"Narrated 'Abdullah bin Az-Zubair: An Ansari man quarrelled with Az-Zubair in the presence of the Prophet about the Harra Canals which were used for irrigating the date-palms. The Ansari man said to Az-Zubair, "Let the water pass' but Az-Zubair refused to do so. So, the case was brought before the Prophet who said to Az-Zubair, "O Zubair! Irrigate (your land) and then let the water pass to your neighbor." On that the Ansari got angry and said to the Prophet, "Is it because he (i.e. Zubair) is your aunt's son?" On that the color of the face of Allah's Apostle changed (because of anger) and he said, "O Zubair! Irrigate (your land) and then withhold the water till it reaches the walls between the pits round the trees." Zubair said, "By Allah, I think that the following verse was revealed on this occasion": "But no, by your Lord They can have No faith Until they make you judge In all disputes between them." (4.65)

English Translation of Holy Hadith (Sahih Bukhari) by M. Muhsin Khan, Volume 3, Book 40, Number 549

"Narrated 'Urwa: When a man from the Ansar quarrelled with AzZubair, the Prophet said, "O Zubair! Irrigate (your land) first and then let the water flow (to the land of the others)." "On that the Ansari said, (to the Prophet), "It is because he is your aunt's son." On that the Prophet said, "O Zubair! Irrigate till the water reaches the walls between the pits around the trees and then stop (i.e. let the water go to the other's land)." I think the following verse was revealed concerning this event: "But no, by your Lord They can have No faith Until they make you judge In all disputes between them." (4.65)

English Translation of Holy Hadith (Sahih Bukhari) by M. Muhsin Khan, Volume 3, Book 40, Number 550

"Narrated 'Urwa bin Az-Zubair: An-Ansari man quarrelled with Az-Zubair about a canal in the Harra which was used for irrigating date-palms. Allah's Apostle, ordering Zubair to be moderate, said, "O Zubair! Irrigate (your land) first and then leave the water for your neighbor." The Ansari said, "Is it because he is your aunt's son?" On that the color of the face of Allah's Apostle changed and he said, "O Zubair! Irrigate (your land) and withhold the water till it reaches the walls that are between the pits around the trees." So, Allah's Apostle gave Zubair his full right. Zubair said, "By Allah, the following verse was revealed in that connection": "But no, by your Lord They can have No faith Until they make you judge In all disputes between them." (4.65)
(The sub-narrator,) Ibn Shihab said to Juraij (another sub-narrator), "The Ansar and the other people interpreted the saying of the Prophet, 'Irrigate (your land) and with-hold the water till it reaches the walls between the pits around the trees,' as meaning up to the ankles."

English Translation of Holy Hadith (Sahih Bukhari) by M. Muhsin Khan, Volume 3, Book 40, Number 551

"Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah's Apostle said, "While a man was walking he felt thirsty and went down a well and drank water from it. On coming out of it, he saw a dog panting and eating mud because of excessive thirst. The man said, "This (dog) is suffering from the same problem as that of mine. So he (went down the well), filled his shoe with water, caught hold of it with his teeth and climbed up and watered the dog. Allah thanked him for his (good) deed and forgave him." The people asked, "O Allah's Apostle! Is there a reward for us in serving (the) animals?" He replied, "Yes, there is a reward for serving any animate."

English Translation of Holy Hadith (Sahih Bukhari) by M. Muhsin Khan, Volume 3, Book 40, Number 554

"Narrated Sahl bin Sad: Once a tumbler (full of milk or water) was brought to Allah's Apostle who drank from it, while on his right side there was sitting a boy who was the youngest of those who were present, and on his left side there were old men. The Prophet asked, "O boy ! Do you allow me to give (the drink) to the elder people (first)?" The boy said, "I will not prefer anybody to have my share from you, O Allah's Apostle!" So, he gave it to the boy. "

English Translation of Holy Hadith (Sahih Bukhari) by M. Muhsin Khan, Volume 3, Book 40, Number 556

"Narrated Ibn 'Abbas: The Prophet said, "May Allah be merciful to the mother of Ishmael! If she had left the water of Zam-Zam (fountain) as it was, (without constructing a basin for keeping the water), (or said, "If she had not taken handfuls of its water"), it would have been a flowing stream. Jurhum (an Arab tribe) came and asked her, 'May we settle at your dwelling?' She said, 'Yes, but you have no right to possess the water.' They agreed."

English Translation of Holy Hadith (Sahih Bukhari) by M. Muhsin Khan, Volume 3, Book 40, Number 557

"Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet said, "There are three types of people whom Allah will neither talk to, nor look at, on the Day of Resurrection. (They are):

1. A man who takes an oath falsely that he has been offered for his goods so much more than what he is given,
2. a man who takes a false oath after the 'Asr prayer in order to grab a Muslim's property, and
3. a man who with-holds his superfluous water. Allah will say to him, "Today I will withhold My Grace from you as you withheld the superfluity of what you had not created."

Water and equity

The Quran warns human beings against unfair distribution by stating that the riches of this world belong to Allah, his Prophet, orphans, the needy, and the wayfarer, and that these riches ought "*not (merely) make a circuit between the wealthy among you.*" In fact, the recognition of water as a vital resource, of which everyone has the right to a fair share, is emphasized by the following *hadith*, which effectively makes water a community resource to which all, rich or poor, have a right: "Muslims have common share in three things: grass (pasture), water and fire (fuel)." On the Prophet's advice, one of his companions, Othman RA, who later became the third Muslim caliph, bought the well of Ruma (a settlement in Arabia) and made its water available free to the Muslim community – the well was actually made into a *waqaf*, a usufruct or a collective property for religious purposes and public utility.

Rights of the environment

As in Christianity and Judaism, in Islam humankind has the first right to the resources that God has provided for his creation. It is well accepted by Islamic scholars (Mallat 1995, 129) that the priority of water use rights is:

first, *haq al shafa* or *shirb*, the law of thirst or the right of humans to drink or quench their thirst;

second, *haq al shafa*, the right of cattle and household animals; and

third, the right of irrigation.

The environment has clear and unmistakable rights in Islam. The immense value of giving water to any creature is reflected by the following *hadith*: "A prostitute was forgiven by Allah, because, passing by a panting dog near a well and seeing that the dog was about to die of thirst, she took off her shoe, and tying it with her head-cover she drew out some water for it. So, Allah forgave her because of that."

The Quran notes that the gift of water is for flora as well: "*vegetation of all kinds*" and "*various colours*" are nourished by rainwater that God sends down.

Humankind's role as steward

Although humans are the most favoured of God's creation, we also are responsible for ensuring that God's gifts are available to all living things. As, in Islam, human-environment interactions are guided by the notion of humans as *khulafa*, viceregents or stewards, of the earth. We (humans) are equal partners with everything else in the natural world, we have added responsibilities. We are decidedly not its lords and masters: but its friends and guardians.

The environment is protected from humans by specific injunctions against upsetting its natural order through pollution or other activities. In the Quran, Allah commands believers to "*make not mischief (fassad) on earth.*"

The meaning of *fassad* can be interpreted as spoiling the natural functioning of the world or spoiling or degrading of natural resources. The Prophet (pbuh) once instructed his companions to return to a bird's nest the eggs they took from it. Islamic scholars and rulers have attached penalties to misuse of water, including polluting or degrading clean water. This opens the door for punishing or fining polluters through modern legislation. Also, the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) very sensibly forbade urination into stagnant water, and advised to guard against three practices, "evacuating one's bowels near water sources, by the roadside and in the shade"

Water conservation

The Quran makes two clear statements regarding water that support water demand management:

First, the supply of water is fixed, and

Second, it should not be wasted.

The statement that water supply is fixed, and that therefore, at some point, demand must be managed because supplies cannot be infinitely increased is: "*And we send down water from the sky in fixed measure.*" The Quran then tells humans that they may use God's gifts for their sustenance in moderation, provided that they commit no excess therein: "*O Children of Adam! . . . Eat and drink: But waste not by excess, for God loveth not the wasters.*"

The *hadith* are even more explicit. The Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) "used to perform ablution with one *mudd* of water [equal to 2/3 litre] and used to take a bath with one *sa'* up to five *mudds* [equal to 2–3 1/2 litres]." This *hadith* demonstrates the logical approach to sustainable water use in arid Arabia where the Prophet lived. However, the Prophet forbade waste even in conditions of seeming plenty when he said "Do not waste water even if performing ablution on the bank of a fast-flowing (large) river."

Islamic water management principles

The overriding principle under all three is that of ensuring equity.

Water as a social good

- Water is first and foremost a social good in Islam – a gift from God and a part of, and necessary for, sustaining all life.
- Water belongs to the community as a whole – no individual literally owns water.
- The first priority for water use is access to drinking water of acceptable quantity and quality to sustain human life, and every human being has the right to this basic water requirement.
- The second and third priorities for water are for domestic animals and for irrigation.
- Humankind is the steward of water on earth.
- The environment (both flora and fauna) has a very strong and legitimate right to water and it is vital to protect the environment by minimizing pollution. Individuals, organizations, and states are liable for harm that they have caused to the environment or to the environmental rights of others, including water use rights.
- Water resources must be managed and used in a sustainable way.
- Sustainable and equitable water management ultimately depends upon following universal values such as fairness, equity, and concern for others.

Water demand management

- Water conservation is central to Islam. Mosques, religious institutes, and religious schools should be used to disseminate this principle so as to complement other religious and secular efforts.
- Wastewater reuse is permissible in Islam; however, the water must meet the required level of treatment to ensure purity and health for its intended purpose.
- Full cost recovery is permissible: that is, the full cost of supplying, treating, storing, and distributing water, as well as the cost of waste-water collection, treatment, and disposal. However, water pricing must be equitable as well as efficient.
- Privatization of water service delivery is permissible in Islam, but the government has a duty to ensure equity in pricing and service.



Integrated water resources management

- Water management requires shura (consultation) with all stake-holders.
- All community members, including both men and women, can play an effective role in water management and should be encouraged to do so.
- Communities must be proactive to ensure equitable access to water resources.
- All nation-states have an obligation to share water fairly with other nation-states.
- Integrated water management is a necessary tool to balance equity across sectors and regions.