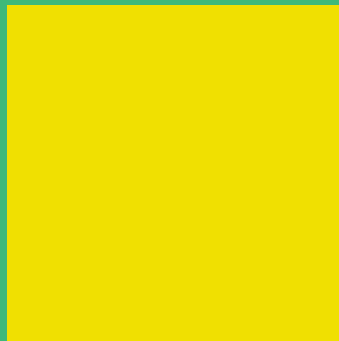


# 3

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ENCOUNTER WITH THE  
ENVIRONMENT: SOCIAL AND  
ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

## MODULE THREE

# ENCOUNTER WITH THE ENVIRONMENT: SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION OF THE VIDEO



Figure 3.1  
Video Clip

Young people across the country are encouraging each other on social media to periodically demonstrate for a new climate policy and social justice. The demonstrations take place every Monday from 10:00 am. While most of the protesters should actually be in school at that time, they argue that their actions serve a higher interest of society. While many schools implicitly agreed to the protesters' absence for the demonstrations, they do not agree with the way some protests occur.

## 3.2 THE CREATURE

### 3.2.1 INTRODUCTION

The problem is that many young people are experiencing an enormous frustration towards what we call “the rich polluting business people”. A small group of young people demonstrate in the driveways of wealthy people.

The Quran refers to the creature as *khalq*. The term *khalq* is related to nature and the universe and can be found in 261 Quranic verses. As for example in Surat Al-Baqara verse 29: *It is He who created for you all of that which is on the earth. Then He directed Himself to the heaven, [His being above all creation], and made them seven heavens, and He is Knowing of all things..*<sup>1</sup> (Al-Baqara:29)

Islam addresses all parts of creation, including ecology. Out of the totality of Quranic verses, 1/8 of it deals with ecology, environment and nature. After all, all human beings has been given the task of maintaining the balance of Allah’s creation. In Sura Arrahman it says: *“..And the heaven He raised and imposed the balance. That you not transgress within the balance. And establish weight in justice and do not make deficient the balance.”*<sup>2</sup>(Ar-rahmane: 7,8 en 9)

Islam’s view on the relationship between mankind and ecology is talked about in both the Qur’an and the Hadiths.<sup>3</sup> Everyone is repeatedly encouraged to treat nature and the earth in a sustainable way. Moreover because the entire universe was created by Allah as a unity. It is therefore up to mankind to preserve and respect that unity of nature and man.



Figure 3.2  
Source: © PRASERT /  
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### 3.2.2 MAN AS KHALIFA ON EARTH

There is a correlation between all the elements of the creature. Allah also added structure in here. That is why we speak of a well balanced creature or *mizan* as explained in the Quran: *“The sun and the moon follow a fixed path. The stars and the trees worship their Lord. He has lifted up the heavens and brought balance. Don’t disturb it (this balance), keep the right size and don’t lose it.”*<sup>4</sup> (Ar-rahmane: 5,6,7,8 en 9)

<sup>1</sup> <https://quran.com/2/29?translations=101,21,20,19,18,17,84,85,22,95> (acces 7.10.2020)

<sup>2</sup> <https://quran.com/21/47?translations=43,18,101,84,85,22,20> (acces 7.10.2020)

<sup>3</sup> I. M. HOPE, J. YOUNG, *islam and ecology*, , 2014, p.1.

<sup>4</sup> <https://quran.com/22/18?translations=17,18,84,20,95,101,85,22,21,19> (acces 7.10.2020).



Besides ecology in general, the Quran also draws attention to the environment. Here too, the central message is that it is the task of man to maintain and respect the balance in nature. We speak

Figure 3.3  
Source: © sarayut\_sy /  
Adobe Stock

of 'laws of nature' to indicate that Allah created the unity of nature in all perfection with the correct calculations. Thus it says in Sura Al Mulk: "You see no imbalance in the creation of the Most Merciful."<sup>5</sup> (Al-Mulk:3).

The interpretation of the Quran makes us realize that man should not be a controller, but rather a guardian of nature. That is why man is considered a steward or *khalifa*: "And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels, I will appoint a *khalifa* upon the earth."<sup>6</sup> (Al-Baqara:30) The original meaning of a *khalifa* is the one responsible for protecting the earth and its capabilities.

The nature gives us signals or *ayats* when things are not going well in nature. It is then up to us, human beings, to give the right reaction and to protect nature more and in a better way. As already explained, man is part of the entire universe along with all other creations. Yet man differs from all other creations because he has the ratio and free will. People have the capacity to think about their actions and choose whether to protect something or not. So unlike animals who just follow their instincts, humans have the intelligence to understand and carry out the imposed task of protecting nature.<sup>7</sup>

In concrete terms, *khalifa* or being responsible means that you as a person take on the following responsibilities:

1. Protect yourself (spiritually, biological, ...)
2. Protecting society (society in general, relationships, your own community and that of others, ...)
3. Protect the earth and its resources (nature, animals, energy sources...)



Figure 3.4  
Source: © onephoto /  
Adobe Stock

<sup>5</sup> <https://quran.com/55?translations=18,85,22,20> (access 7.10.2020).

<sup>6</sup> <https://quran.com/2/30?translations=17,101,22,21,19,20,18,95> (access 7.10.2020).

<sup>7</sup> I. M. HOPE, J. YOUNG, *Islam and ecology*, 2014, p.1.

### 3.2.3 EXERCISES

#### Exercise 1: Fill out Exercise

Complete the scheme with the correct answer.



#### Exercise 2

Read the statements below and put a mark in the right column.

| Statement   | True | False |
|---|------|-------|
| 1. 1/8 of the Quran is about ecology, environment and nature.   |      |       |
| 2. Animals have a free will and a ratio. That's the reason why they have the task of taking care of nature. |      |       |
| 3. A khalifa is responsible for protecting himsel/herself, the society and the earth.                       |      |       |
| 4. The creation of Allah is unbalanced or not a mizan.  |      |       |
| Did people continue to discuss throughout history about the precise interpretation of <i>sharia</i> ?       |      |       |

## 3.3 ISLAMIC ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

### 3.3.1 HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR

In the section on human beings as *khalifa's* we've already discussed the fact that the Quran draws a lot of attention to the environment in general. It's not enough to just follow the rules stipulated in the Five Pillars of Islam to be a good Muslim. There are other (un)written ethical principles such as respecting and protecting the environment. As humans, we should be careful and frugal with the resources, we should pollute nature as little as possible and carry out a sustainable and ecological behavior. These principles of responsible behavior are not less important than the well-known Five Pillars of the Islam.

The *hadith* tells us more about the lifestyle of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. It also confirms that the Prophet considered environmentally responsible behavior as part of the authentic Islamic way of life. Fun fact is that most of the prophets were shepherds, which meant they were constantly in touch with nature and animals. The Prophet also asked Muslims to be careful with nature in every situation, even during difficult times like war.

This is emphasized by Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, a close companion and successor of the Prophet Muhammad. He said to one of his military commanders: *"I advise you the following ten things (regarding the rules of warfare). Do not kill women or children, the elderly or the sick. Do not cut down or*



*burn trees, especially if they are fruit-bearing trees. Do not destroy uninhabited places. Do not kill animals except for providing food. Do not burn or separate bees. Do not steal any of the items that were confiscated during the battle. And don't act cowardly."*<sup>8</sup> (Al-Muwatta, Volume 21, Hadith 10)

The Quran constantly reminds us of the beauty of nature. Surah Al Ghashiyah in verses 16-18 explicitly invites to be aware of the beauty of nature by regularly observing and enjoying it: *"Don't they look at how the camels were created? And how the mountains stand firmly? Don't they look at how spread out the earth is?"*<sup>9</sup> (Al-Ghashiyah: 17,18,19,20) If we take the time to look at nature in a more conscious way, we will be able to realize the greatness and the beauty it has in it.

Figure 3.5  
Source: © Jon Anders Wiken / Adobe Stock

<sup>8</sup> I. MALIK, al-Muwatta, Beiroet, Dar Iyha Attourat Alarabiya, 1985, p. 212.

<sup>9</sup> <https://quran.com/15/19?translations=22,85,101,84,20,21,19,18,17,95> (acces 7.10.2020).

### 3.3.2 EXERCISES

#### Exercise 1

Fill out the missing words.

**the environment – resources – respecting and protecting – *khalifa* – ecological behavior - Five Pillars of Islam**

In the section on human beings  as we've already discussed the fact that the Quran draws a lot of attention  to in general. It's not enough to just follow the rules stipulated in the  to  be a good Muslim. There are other (un)written ethical principles such  as the environment. As humans, we should be careful and frugal with the  we should pollute nature as little as possible and carry out a sustainable   and These principles of responsible behavior are not less important than the well-known Five Pillars of the Islam.

## 3.4 ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

### 3.4.1 RESPONSIBLE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

In a society with social justice, every person has the same right and access to the basic needs. Ecology and nature can be linked to this topic of social justice. A good example is a society in which everyone is entitled to water as a basic need.

The Quran emphasizes the crucial role of water. Water is considered a source of life and one of the most precious resources.<sup>10</sup> The word water or ma'a occurs more than seventy times in the Quran.<sup>11</sup> Some examples are:

*"And Allah has sent water from heaven, and He revives the earth with it after its death. Verily in this is a sign for those who listen."<sup>12</sup> (An-Nahl:65)*

*" And have you seen the water that you drink? Is it you who brought it down from the clouds, or is it We who bring it down? If We willed, We could make it bitter, so why are you not grateful?!"<sup>13</sup> (Al-Waqi'ah: 68,69,70)*

Water is an essential source for the creation and development of life. For example, it is necessary for the livelihood of humans, of animals and it is necessary for plant growth. Humans and animals need drinking water. Finally, we can barely imagine a life without the possibility to take a shower or a bath; water provides us good hygiene.



Figure 3.6  
Source: © willyam /  
Adobe Stock

It is clear that water will always play a vital role in the universe. But it is also becoming clear that we are dealing with the problems of water scarcity, dryness,... Water is not inexhaustible and might, at some moment, run out. It is therefore our responsibility to prevent water shortages by creating sustainable solutions.

As a khalifa, we must be aware of the scarceness of energy sources and carry out a sustainable and ecological behavior.

<sup>10</sup> S. CATOVIC, J. YOUNG, Islamic sacred texts related to water, New Jersey , p.1-5.

<sup>11</sup> More examples can be found on: [https://www.faithinwater.org/uploads/4/4/3/0/44307383/islamic\\_sacred\\_texts-water-greenfaith.pdf](https://www.faithinwater.org/uploads/4/4/3/0/44307383/islamic_sacred_texts-water-greenfaith.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://quran.com/16/65?translations=101,22,17,21,19,18,20,84,95> (acces 7.10.2020).

<sup>13</sup> <https://quran.com/56/68-78> (acces 7.10.2020).



### 3.4.2 USING NATURAL RESOURCES FAIRLY

It is common knowledge that humans consume a lot. We often consume much more than we actually need to survive. Think of the food scraps after every meal that end up with the garbage. It is important to find a balance in that consumption. Even if there would be an abundance of certain natural resources, it wouldn't have been just to unnecessarily exhaust these resources. Ending overconsumption by consuming in a balanced way, would help to achieve the goal of unity and conservation of nature.<sup>14</sup> A real *khalifa* always keeps these goals in mind.



Figure 3.7  
Source: © VectorMine /  
Adobe Stock

The Quran explicitly states not to waste nor to overconsume. Surah Al A'raf points out that consuming is obviously not forbidden, but that it must be done in a balanced way: ***“O children of Adam, take your adornment at every masjid, and eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess.”***<sup>15</sup> (Al-A'raf: 31)

Balanced consumption makes it easier to equally distribute natural resources in order to achieve a society with social justice. Yet we see that this has become more and more difficult over the years. If everyone only thinks about himself when consuming, he will not be able to remind himself that the supply of natural resources must also provide other people, animals and plants for a living. This creates an unequal and unjust distribution of natural resources. This is the negative effect the Quran tries to warn for.

<sup>14</sup> S. OZKAYA, *Islam en Ecologie: De ecologische ethiek van de islam gezien vanuit de visie op de relatie tussen mens en natuur*, Leiden, 2013, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> <https://quran.com/7/31-41> (access 7.10.2020).

### 3.4.3 EXERCISES

#### Exercise 1

Answer the following questions.

1) What characterizes a society with social justice? Give an example:

2) How many times does the term ma'a or water occur in the Quran?

3) How can we achieve the goal of unity and conservation of nature?

## 3.5 GLOSSARY

### **Hadth**

All that is attributed to the Prophet Muhammad of words, deeds, implicit approvals, appearance and personality.

### **Khalifa**

An trustee on Earth or protector of nature.

### **Ratio**

Reason, the human mind able of thinking and understanding.

### **Ayats**

Verses from the Quran.

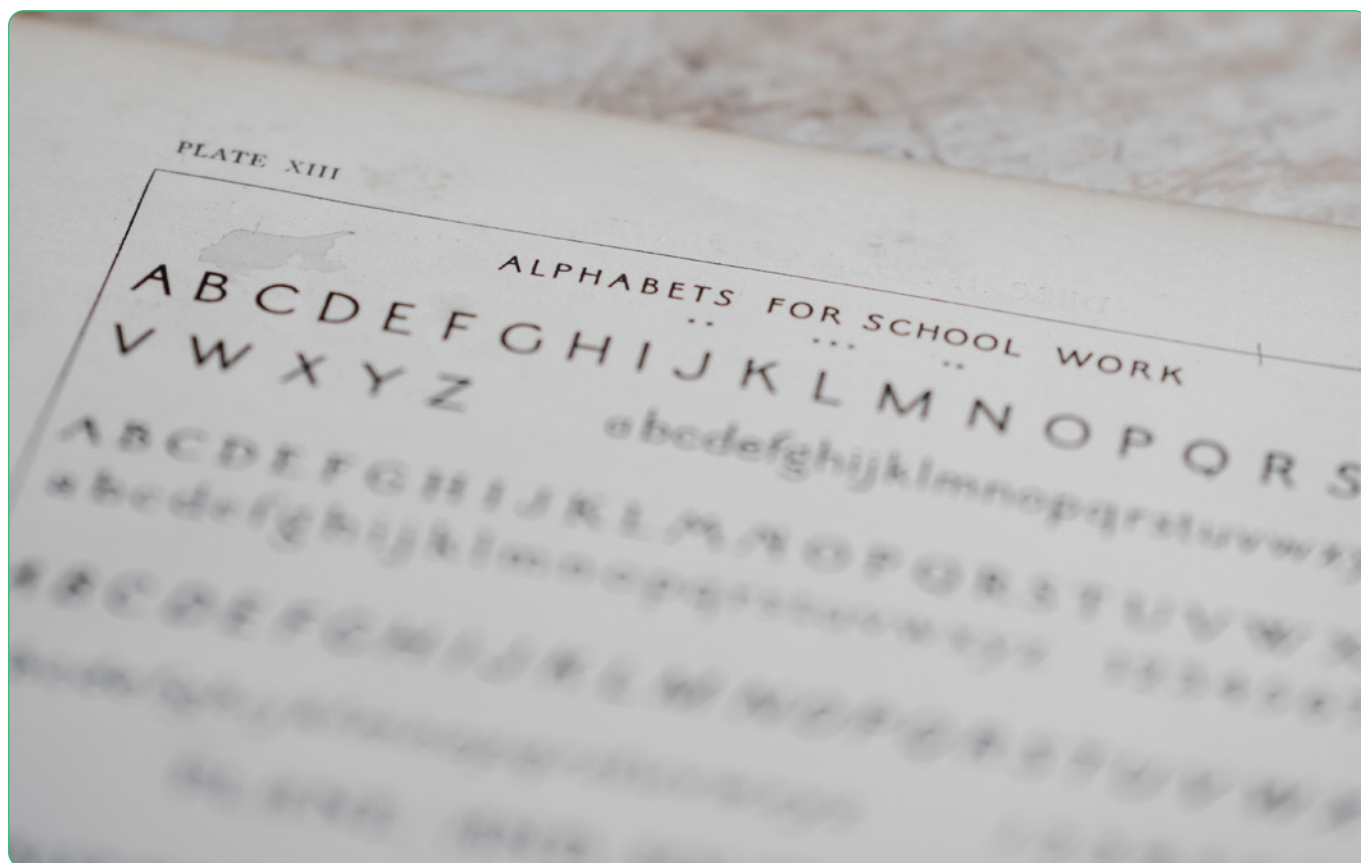


Photo: © Annie Spratt | Unsplash

## 3.6 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

Ahmed and Pieter-Jan are watching the news.

Television:

*After the climate march, the students finished their protest in front of the house of the well known businessman Tarik Hadid. The students also destroyed the garden of mister Hadid. According to them, Tarik Hadid is also responsible for the problem of environmental pollution.*

*The climate march is an initiative of students in order to make the government and polluting companies to take their responsibility.*

Ahmed:

*"Oh no, I know these people. Tarik Hadid is weekly present at our local mosque to pray. But I also know the students! I've heard that Tarik is very upset because they destroyed his garden and I actually understand that.*

Pieter-Jan:

*"Really?"*

Ahmed:

*"These students have gone too far, don't you think?"*

Pieter-Jan:

*"I understand their concerns but this is not the right way to create awareness."*

Ahmed:

*"Indeed, I understand them too. They should enter into a dialogue with each other."*

Pieter-Jan:

*"Why don't you bring them together then? Maybe you can bring them around the table and even mediate?"*

Ahmed:

*"What a good idea! You know what? During Islam class we learned about the importance of taking care of our planet. Now I have to set up an ecological project. The aim of the project is to create awareness and small changes in your own environment. I can start my project with this situation! We must be encouraged to take responsibility for the environment. I can bring the students and mister Hadid together in our mosque."*

Pieter-Jan:

*"Wow, that's a good idea. It's a win-win."*

Meeting in the local mosque:

*Ahmed has invited everyone to enter into a dialogue about climate change.*

*Mr. Hadid is a major investor of the mosque. He is a progressive thinker and always open to new ideas.*

*Ahmed: "Mr Hadid, we are so thankful that you wanted to speak to the students."*

Mr Hadid:

*"You are welcome Ahmed, I am curious why exactly you invited us to meet in the mosque."*

One of the students:

*"In the Quran it is said that Allah has made us, humankind, as protectors of the universe." (35:39) "He is the one who has appointed you as a proxy on earth."*

*We want to apply this Islamic environmental ethics in our mosque. The mosque is the most important place of worship. Allah has given us the responsibility to take care of our earth. Taking care of nature is one of our tasks as human beings.*

*Our Prophet Mohamed lived in the nature which made him aware of the importance of animal welfare,... All our prophets were also shepherds and took care of animals and nature. That's quite a difference from how most of us live now. We are no longer in touch with nature."*

Mr Hadid:

*"Okay, I know what you mean. But what is your concrete proposal? How can the mosque become more ecological in your opinion?"*

One of the students:

*"We want to make people aware of environmental pollution and global warming. We strongly believe, Mr Hadid, that people like you can make a difference."*

Mr Hadid:

*"Okay guys, you have a lot of interesting things to say. I want to hear more about your ideas.*

Ahmed:

*"We have developed a plan with multiple suggestions.*

*For example, we can start a community-garden project. This project provides resourceful green spaces on which we can grow sustainable food while also creating community cohesion. In this way, Muslims come into closer contact with each other and with nature.*

*We can also set up a water project by for example putting up signs to make people aware to limit their use of water. There are also several hadiths about the use of water we can refer to.*

*We also need to reduce the use of plastic.*

*(While the plans are being explained, they appear on the screen in clouds of thoughts)*

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# CiRRA

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Lapino Albino



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