

# Maintaining a Healthy Environment: An Islamic Ethical Approach

**Nurdeng Deuraseh**

Associate Professor, Department of Government and Civilization Studies  
Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)  
43400 UPM, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia  
E-mail: nurdeng@putra.upm.edu.my or inasanis@hotmail.com

## Abstract

Islam plays an important role in preservation of the quality of a precious environment. This is because, according to Islam, not only Allah (s.w.t) has absolute sovereignty over man's life and death, but man has no dominion over his own life or non-human life. Man cannot act as owner over the environmental elements. This is one of the ultimate objectives of Islamic law that is to create a healthy environment. Each individual Muslim as well as Muslim community must honestly strive to develop and maintain a healthy environment. In this paper, attempts will be made to highlight the contribution of Islamic ethical discipline in protection of environment. In order to fit our discussion with the purpose of our central theme, that is, protection against environmental pollution according to Islamic ethical discipline, it is necessary to discuss the Islamic concepts of *al-mizan* and *man of adab*. This is because they are among the important principles, which teach us how to behave and how to deal with the environment. We hope that the research will present a timely reminder in relation to the attitude of man towards his natural environment. Each individual must honestly strive to develop and maintain a healthy environment.

**Keywords:** Healthy Environment, Natural Environmental Elements; Islamic Civilization; *al-Mizan* as Sunnatullah, *Man of Adab*.

## 1. Introduction

The environmental crisis is one of the major problems of the contemporary world which no doubt affect the health of individuals and society at large. Although it is commonly held that environmental crisis is mainly caused by scientific and technological misdemeanor and misapplication of resources, Lynn White, in his article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", has alleged for the first time that world religions are the root causes of environmental problems. In his article, he stresses that what people think about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny, that is: by religion.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> For details, see Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" in *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 1967). S.H. Nasr in his "Islam and the Environmental Crisis," is of the opinion that: Of course, the environmental crisis is not only Western but global. And although the Muslims for the most part endanger themselves in their heedless attitude towards the environment while the highly industrialized countries threaten the ecology of the whole globe, it is absolutely essential for the Islamic world to face this issue in a most serious manner. It is also important for everyone to realize that since the environmental crisis is global, it requires global attention. The Islamic world must do its utmost to bring its rich intellectual and ethical tradition to bear upon this problem as the West must realize that there is a wisdom within the Islamic tradition concerning nature and the natural environment which can be of great significance for those in the West who are in quest of reformulating a theology of nature. (see, S.H. Nasr, "Islam and the Environmental Crisis," in *MAAS*

It is clear from the foregoing opinion that, according to White, what individuals and communities do to their environment depends upon how they see themselves in relation to nature. Thus, the current environmental crisis is largely a result of man's view of life and his attitude towards nature, both of which have roots in his culture and religion. He argues that the dualistic nature of monotheistic religions has caused the separation of human beings from the rest of nature and thereby paved a way for the beginning of environmental crisis. Arguing on similar lines, Arnold Toynbee, a famous historian writes that:

Some of the major maladies of the present day world--for instance the recklessly extravagant consumption of nature's irreplaceable treasures and the pollution of those of them that man has not already devoured--can be traced back in the last analysis to a religious cause and that this cause is the rise of monotheism.<sup>2</sup>

The environmental crisis that confronts the world today is not insoluble. Unfortunately, so far, most potential solutions involve technology or change in existing institutional mechanisms. In other words, the efforts to solve the problem are mainly through changing the existing institutional mechanisms through laws and public policy and not a change in attitudes and beliefs of man. Thus, these efforts are not proving very effective. Because of the slow effect in solving the current environmental crisis, many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars are becoming increasingly interested in religious teachings, in general, and Divine Law of Islam, in particular, with the intention of finding out the solution to the environmental crisis.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. The Islamic Ethical Relationship between Environment and Health

In order to highlight the ethical relationship between environment and health, it is necessary to give the views of physicians with regard to this matter. Accordingly, environmental components play a very important role in the health conditions of human beings.<sup>4</sup> Before Islam, Greek scholars like Hippocrates (460-370 B.C) and Galen (129-200 C.E) talked about the components of natural environment. In the Hippocratic treatise, *Airs, Times, Waters and Places*, one of the early classics of medical geography, the relationship between natural environment and health is clearly explained. In this treatise, he describes the influence of climatological and geographical factors on human health. He tells us what are the common diseases that occur in particular locations, seasons, winds, and air.<sup>5</sup> The

---

*Journal of Islamic Science* 6, no. 2 (July-December, 1990), repr., in *Islam and the Environment*, ed. A.R. Agwan (New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies, 1997), 31).

<sup>2</sup> Arnold Toynbee, "The Religious Background of the Present Environmental Crisis," in *International Journal of Environmental Studies* 3 (1972): 144.

<sup>3</sup> For a highly readable and knowledgeable account of environmental crisis from an Islamic perspective, see Khalid Mahmud 'Abdullatif, *al-Bi'ah wa al-Talawwuth: Min Manzar al-Islam* (Cairo: Dar al-Sahwah li al-Nashr, 1993); Muhammad 'Abdul Qadir al-Faqi, *al-Bi'ah: Mashakiluha wa Himiyatiha min al-Talawwuth (Ru'yah Islamiyyah)* (Cairo: Maktabah Ibn Sina, 1993); S.H. Nasr, "Islam and the Environmental Crisis," in *MAAS Journal of Islamic Science* 6, no. 2 (July-December 1990). In this article, he underlines the Islamic love of nature as manifesting the signs of God, 'ŷyah. It also distinguishes the situation of Islam today from that of the West as far as the environmental crisis is concerned. Recently, a joint publication of ICUN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Environment) and the Department of Meteorology and Environmental Protection of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia entitled *Islamic Principles on the Conservation of the Environment* has come out. This work presents the Islamic concept of the environment, and the relationship and interaction between man and nature. See, Abubakar Ahmad Bakadar et al, "Islamic Principles on the Conservation of the Environment", in *Islam and Environment*, ed. A.G Agwan (New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies, 1997), 71-107.

<sup>4</sup> For the theme of human beings and their relationship to nature, see Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the Eighteenth Century*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

<sup>5</sup> Galen, *Galen's Commentary on the Hippocratic Treatise Airs, Waters, Places*, ed. and trans. Abraham Wasserstein (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982), 11-33. For discussion about Airs, Waters, Places, see Genevieve Miller, "Airs, Waters, and Places," in *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 17 (1962):

awareness of the importance of ecological factors for human health was widespread in medieval Islamic literature. The physicians considered climatic effects to be one of the major causes of diseases. For this reason, they strongly stressed that the physicians should carefully study the climate of certain locations in order to treat better and maintain the patients' health.<sup>6</sup> The famous Jewish writer Maimonides (600/1204) recommends the best possible place for the people to live by saying:

If there is no choice in this matter, for we have grown up in the cities and have become accustomed to them, you should at least select from the cities one of open horizons, especially towards the north and the east, high in the hill or on the mountains, and sparse in trees and waters. If you have no choice and cannot emigrate from the city, endeavor at least to dwell on the outskirts of the city, facing north and east.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to that, they accurately observe that the illness of a person occurs due to the disturbance of the natural balance between the internal and external environments of a person.<sup>8</sup> In this light of argument, to maintain such a balance, man must understand that everything is not only physically relevant but also spiritually sacred to him. In line with this theory, one may conclude that man is able to preserve his health, or conversely can cure his sickness, by maintaining his sympathy with nature. On this basis, Jalal al-Din al-Rumi (d. 672/1273) has summarized the basic principle dominating the natural order in a single poem: "The harmony between opposites is the principle of this world."<sup>9</sup> This poem indicates that in relation to the health of human beings, good health is strongly functioning according to the condition of nature while diseases are a condition contrary to nature. This is a unique methodology which is available in almost all the medical systems. The only difference with the Islamic system is that while Muslims are enjoined by their religion to strive and pray to Allah (s.a.w) for good health, they are also taught to have the correct attitudes and responsibilities towards the environment. By applying the concept of *takaful* in Islam, it leads us to understand that health is not the responsibility of physicians or health authorities alone but everyone must participate in attaining health for all.

Moreover, the role of the individual does not stop at maintaining cleanliness, observing a moderate diet and taking regular exercise, but it extends to avoidance of those things that are harmful to health, both one's own health and that of others. In this context, Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) says: *la darar wala dirar fi al-Islam* (no injury should be imposed nor an injury to be inflicted as a penalty for another injury).<sup>10</sup> This indicates that no one may inflict harm on himself and other. Significantly, the harm, according to this maxim, is not only specific --not to harm-- to human beings but the same is applied to the environment, since harm to it contributes to the spread of, and increase in, diseases and thereby threatens everyone's right to a healthy life. Therefore, according to Islamic law, pollution, which threatens the life and health of others such as infants, children, young and old, and other creatures, is prohibited.

There are also practical reasons why the Muslim should master knowledge of the environment. According to Islamic law, it is impossible to implement the *Shari'ah* without proper knowledge of the environment. In other words, those who do not understand the environment cannot deal properly with the implementation of Islamic laws. For example, according to the *Shari'ah*, punishment for theft is

---

129-40; S.K. Hamarneh, *Background of Yunani Arabic and Islamic Medicine and Pharmacy* (Karachi: Hamdard Foundation, 1997), 71-72.

<sup>6</sup> For details see, al-Ruhawi, *Adab al-Tabib*, ed. Marizan 'Asiri (Riyadh: Markaz al-Malik Faysal li al-Buhuth wa al-Dirasat al-Islamiyyah, 1992), 126; Mazhar H. Shah, *The General Principles of Avicenna's Canon of Medicine* (Karachi: Naveed Clinic, 1966), 346-348.

<sup>7</sup> Gerrit Bos, "Maimonides on Preservation of Health," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 4 (1994): 227.

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Sina, *al-Qanun fi al-Tibb*, 3 vols., ed. Edward al-Qish and 'Ali Zay'ur (Beirut: Mu'assasah 'Izz al-Din li al-Tiba'ah wa al-Nashr, 1993), 1: 195-197; Mazhar H. Shah, *The General Principles of Avicenna's Canon of Medicine*, 25-35.

<sup>9</sup> M. W. Dols, *Medieval Islamic Medicine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 16; S.H.Nasr, *Islamic Science: An Illustrated Study* (Istanbul: insan yainlari, 1989), 228.

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Kitab al-Ahkam, Bab man buniya fi haqqihi ma yadurr bi jarihi, hadith no 2340.

amputation. However, the decree cannot be implemented on a thief by a judge if there is famine that occurs due to drought.

### 3. Maintaining a Healthy Environment as Maintaining God's Balance and Measure (*Al-Mizan Wa Al-Taqdir*)

According to Islam, Creation, which is a sign of God (*'ayat Allah*), is the book of which Allah (s.w.t) is the author. Thus, it is impossible for man to know Allah (s.w.t) without knowing and observing what is in our surroundings. A closer look at *al-Asma' al-Husna* (God's Divine Names) which are found in the Holy Qur'an, reveals that *al-Muhit* (Who encompasses all things) is one of the ninety-nine names of Allah (s.w.t). This indicates that Almighty Allah (s.w.t) encompasses all things and He is indeed close by, even though we do not comprehend the full significance of these terms.<sup>11</sup> Allah (s.w.t) says in the *Qur'an*: "But to God belong all things in the heavens and on earth: and it is He who encompassed (*muhit*) all things."<sup>12</sup> Thus, the term *Muhit* also means environment. In a deeper sense, it is always true to say that God Himself is the Ultimate Environment which surrounds and encompasses all things. Thus, knowledge about the environment becomes important and obligatory as the knowledge of Allah (s.w.t) or unity of God. Its understanding is instrumental in bringing us closer to God.

Interestingly, all environmental elements are complexly interlocked one to another so as to maintain the equilibrium of environment. It is *sunnat Allah* to remain in this condition since it was created by Allah (s.w.t) with justice. If there is injustice in creation, it is impossible to remain in proper and systematic balance. This is because everything that is unjust will deviate from balance and then lead to decay and corruption.<sup>13</sup> The way this equilibrium and justice was established is only known to Almighty Allah (s.w.t). It is obvious that the proportion, the measure and the balance of nature are known in the *Qur'anic* context as *al-Mizan*. Allah (s.w.t) says:

And He has raised the Heaven; and He has set the Balance (therein) so that you exceed not the Balance. Observe the Balance with proportion, and don't lose the Balance.<sup>14</sup>  
Verily, all things have We created by measure.<sup>15</sup>

The above *Qur'anic* verses indicate that whatever Allah (s.w.t) has created in this universe was created in due proportion and measure both quantitatively and qualitatively. This concept is distinct enough. That is because it gives the values of unity, balance, order and harmony. According to the *Mufasssirun* of the Holy *Qur'an*, balance not only governs the structuring of the universe, it has specified each element with its proper place and defined function.<sup>16</sup> There is no doubt that this concept, which is set by the *Qur'an*, must be accepted at all. Now, it is incumbent upon us to clarify the law of conservation of "mass" which states that the total quantity of matter is always constant. In short, man can at best alter the shape and nature of any existence, but cannot make it nil, nor can he add or deduct from the existing amount without a corresponding loss or gain on the other side.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, this concept is true if man looks at himself in relation to other things which surround him on earth. He will observe that he lives in constant interaction with other forms of life and the physical elements of the environment, each of which components contributes to the functioning and balance of nature.

<sup>11</sup> Ahmad b. al-Husayn b. ʿAli al-Bayhaqi, *al-Asma' wa al-Sifat*, ed. ʿAbd al-Rahman ʿUmayrah (Beirut: Dar al-Jayl, 1998), 72. In English, see Muhammad Iqbal Siddiqi, *Ninety Nine Names of Allah* (Lahore: Kazi Publications, 1987), 150.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Nisa' (4):126

<sup>13</sup> Al-Hijr (15): 85; Al-Dukhan (44): 39.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Rahman (55): 7-9.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Qamr (54):49

<sup>16</sup> Al-Qurtubi, *al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an*, 20 vols. (Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 1994), 17: 150-1; Muhammad Mahmud Hijazi, *al-Tafsir al-Wadih*, 3 vols. (Cairo: Dar al-Tafsir li al-Tab' wa al-Nashr, 1980), 3: 106-7.

<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Wazed Ali, "Science in the Qur'an," in *Muslim Contribution to Science*, ed. Muhammad R. Mirza and Muhammad Iqbal Siddiqi (Lahore: Kazi Publications, 1989), 77.

#### 4. Man of Adab and his Role in Maintaining Environment from Pollution

From the very beginning, people have attempted to solve environmental crisis by changing the existing institutional mechanisms through laws and public policies, and not attempting to change the attitudes and beliefs of modern people toward the environment.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the efforts to solve the problem are mainly through changing the existing institutional mechanisms through laws and public policy and not a change in attitudes and beliefs of man. Thus, these efforts are not proving very effective. Because of the slow effect in solving the current environmental crisis, many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars are becoming increasingly interested in religious teachings, in general, and Divine Law of Islam, in particular, with the intention of finding out the solution to the environmental crisis.<sup>19</sup> In this regard, S.M.N. al-Attas has attempted to provide solutions to environmental crisis by looking at the root cause of the problem. He has accurately observed that protecting the environment from corruption cannot be fully practiced without constantly striving to improve every aspect of man towards perfection as a man of *Adab*. He defines a man of *Adab* (*insan adabi*) as: the one who is sincerely conscious of his responsibilities towards the true God who understands and fulfills his obligations to himself and others in his society with justice; who constantly strives to improve every aspect of himself towards perfection as a man of *Adab*.<sup>20</sup>

As long as mankind possesses the attitude as explained by al-Attas, balance between natural environment and human life is possible.<sup>21</sup> As man of *Adab*, he has been granted stewardship to manage the earth in accordance with the purposes intended by his Creator; to utilize it for his own benefit and the benefit of other created beings, and for the fulfillment of his interests and theirs. As a man of *Adab* on earth, he must fulfill that trust which he accepted when he bore witness to God's Lordship in the pre-eternal covenant (*al-mithaq*) to which the *Qur'an* refers in the famous verse, "Am I not your Lord? Thy say: ye, we bear witness."<sup>22</sup> *Amanah* is mentioned in several verses of the *Qur'an*. Among these are:

---

<sup>18</sup> It is now universally accepted that environmental crisis is one of the major problems of the contemporary world which no doubt affect the health of individuals and society at large. Although it is commonly held that environmental crisis is mainly caused by scientific and technological misdemeanor and misapplication of resources, Lynn White, in his article, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" in *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 1967), has alleged for the first time that world religions are the root causes of environmental problems. In this article, he stresses that what people think about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny, that is: by religion. Furthermore, he argues that the dualistic nature of monotheistic religions has caused the separation of human beings from the rest of nature and thereby paved a way for the beginning of environmental crisis. Arguing on similar lines, Arnold Toynbee, a famous historian writes that: Some of the major maladies of the present day world--for instance the recklessly extravagant consumption of nature's irreplaceable treasures and the pollution of those of them that man has not already devoured--can be traced back in the last analysis to a religious cause and that this cause is the rise of monotheism. See, Arnold Toynbee, "The Religious Background of the Present Environmental Crisis," in *International Journal of Environmental Studies* 3 (1972): 144.

<sup>19</sup> For detail, see Khalid Mahmud 'Abdullatif, *al-Bi'ah wa al-Talawwuth: Min Manzur al-Islam* (Cairo: Dar al-Sahwah li al-Nashr, 1993); Muhammad 'Abdul Qadir al-Faqi, *al-Bi'ah: Mashakiluha wa Himayatiha min al-Talawwuth (Ru'yah Islamiyyah)* (Cairo: Maktabah Ibn Sina, 1993); S.H. Nasr, "Islam and the Environmental Crisis," in *MAAS Journal of Islamic Science* 6, no. 2 (July-December 1990). In this article, he underlines the Islamic love of nature as manifesting the signs of God, 'ayah. It also distinguishes the situation of Islam today from that of the West as far as the environmental crisis is concerned. Recently, a joint publication of ICUN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Environment) and the Department of Meteorology and Environmental Protection of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia entitled *Islamic Principles on the Conservation of the Environment* has come out. This work presents the Islamic concept of the environment, and the relationship and interaction between man and nature. See, Abubakar Ahmad Bakadar et al, "Islamic Principles on the Conservation of the Environment", in *Islam and Environment*, ed. A.G Agwan (New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies, 1997), 71-107.

<sup>20</sup> W.M.N. Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998), 133. See also, S.M.N. al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2001), 18-9.

<sup>21</sup> S.M.N. Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ABIM, 1980; repr., Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1991), 22-29 (page reference is to the reprint edition).

<sup>22</sup> Al-'Araf (7):172.

Verily, We did offer the *amanah* to the heavens and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it. Yet man took it up-for, verily, he has always been prone to tyranny and foolishness.<sup>23</sup>

O ye who have attained to faith, do not be false to Allah and His Messenger, and do not knowingly be false to the *amanah* that has been reposed in you; and know that your possessions and your progeny are but a test and a temptation, and that with Allah there is an immense reward.<sup>24</sup>

In order to explain the choice in Islamic perspective, one has to be aware that his exercise of power on earth is allowed only on condition that it be according to God's laws. That is why while Islamic law is tolerant and grants man freedom of action and knowledge, he must fulfill all his individual and social obligations. The concept of freedom in Islam -- as reflected from the term *al-Ikhtiyar* -- is however the choice of good. This is subject to the principle of not causing harm. In relation to this, S.M.N. al-Attas, in many places, stresses that:

We maintain that *ikhtiyar* does not simply mean 'choice'. The word *khayr*, meaning 'good' which is bound in meaning with *ikhtiyar* and being derived from the same root, determines that the choice meant is towards what is good. This is most important when aligned to the philosophical question of freedom. A so-called 'choice' towards what is bad is therefore not a choice. Since we affirm that freedom is to act our real and true nature demands, only the exercise of that choice which is good can properly be called a 'free choice'. A choice for better is an exercise of freedom. It presupposes knowledge of good and evil. A 'choice' for the worse is not a choice, as it is based upon ignorance and on the instigation of the soul that inclines towards the blameworthy aspects of the animal powers.<sup>25</sup>

It must be known that under Islamic criminal law, harm, injury, wrong or crime shouldn't be committed against any creature. This is regardless of the nature of such a creature, whether human, animal or otherwise. Significantly, according to Islamic law, when there is an injustice or crime against another creature, one not only has to try to repair the damage by compensation to the victim of one's violation of the right which had been taken away from him, but he also has to beg for the forgiveness of Allah (s.w.t). On the basis of these rules, activities against animals and the natural environment are crimes against one's immediate victim, and also a crime against God, since the criminal conduct in question constitutes a violation of Divine prescriptions. In connection with this, Muslim jurists maintain that conservation of environment is one of the rights of Allah (s.w.t) to which man is responsible. Man would be liable to reckoning and punishment if he behaves in a manner not acceptable to the Lord. This is because the consequence of misusing the natural environment is not only an injustice committed to man himself and his generation but also an injustice committed against future generations which are entitled to benefit from the natural environment.

As man of *Adab*, he is enjoined to protect and preserve his own life as well as that of others. Human life is highly regarded, respected, and protected in Islamic law, that no one is allowed to commit suicide (*intihar*) even though he or she is afflicted with horrifying and cause long-drawn suffering notably incurable diseases. Since, according to Islamic law, the patient has the right to know his illness, therefore the physician should acquire appropriate ways of answering his patients' questions. He should thoroughly study the psychological problems of his patient and adapt his explanations to each particular situation, and use phrases and descriptions that do not increase sufferings and anxiety. This understanding leads one logically to conclude that a doctor cannot be permitted to use any drug or employ any means to bring about the death of a patient at the request of or with the consent with the relative of the patient. In any situation, Islam demands the people to struggle and fight the problem as well as to exercise patience, fortitude and *tawakkal* (putting one's trust in

---

<sup>23</sup> Al-Ahzab (33):74.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Anfal (8):27-28.

<sup>25</sup> S.M.N. Al-Attas, *The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), 7-8.

Allah (s.w.t). The latter, *tawakkal*, is an important aspect in Islamic medicine but it is only done after all efforts to treat the sickness have been exhausted, as only Allah (s.w.t) can cure the disease or any ailment, and not the practitioners.<sup>26</sup>

Even though, no clear earthly punishment is prescribed for suicide or attempted suicide, Islam strictly prohibits suicide and any attempt to terminate any one's life. While scholars debate whether or not the Qur'an itself specifically forbids suicide, they agree that the hadith prohibits suicide. In this regard, verse of the Qur'an "*wala taqtulu anfusakum: and do not kill your selves*"<sup>27</sup> is interpreted by many Muslim exegetes as referring to "do not kill each other." This prohibition, mutual killing, is cited as evidence for prohibition of suicide in Islam. A Muslim's killing another Muslim is tantamount to killing himself or herself.<sup>28</sup> As for *hadith* on suicide, the Prophet spoke of suicide as something leading to punishment in the hereafter. He said: "He who commits suicide by throttling shall keep on throttling himself in the Hell-Fire (for ever) and he who commits suicide by stabling himself shall keep on stabling himself in Hell-Fire."<sup>29</sup> This hadith indicates that the person who commits suicide will be denied Paradise and will spend his time in Hell repeating the deed by which he had ended his life. For this reason, many Muslim scholars generally considered suicide as a grave sin.<sup>30</sup> The impact of this injunction has considerable force in Islamic countries and it may be one of the reasons why, the incidence of suicide in the Muslim community is so rare.

In the light of this discussion, the following question may rightly be asked. Why Islam strongly prohibited suicide?. It should be clarified here that no person, in Islamic law, has a right to commit suicide for many reasons. First, the whole universe and everything in it has been created and brought into existence by Allah (s.w.t) alone and He alone is managing all the affairs in the universe. Therefore, man cannot commit suicide because in that case he would be exercising his control over something of which he is not the owner and does so against the wishes of the real Owner. Secondly, committing suicide is escapism seeking escape from the struggle of life. This is cowardice. If suicide were to be permitted to get rid of suffering, it would promote the tendency of seeking escape in death instead of developing a fighting spirit against odds. Thirdly, every person in the society is tied up with his parents, children, brothers, sisters and friends at large and has got some duties and obligations to them. He who commits suicide does avoid the obligations cast upon him and harms the interests of society. Likewise, Islam forbids its followers from wishing and praying for deaths in the face of acute suffering. The Prophet is reported to have said: "None of you should wish for death, for if he is a good doer, he may increase his good deeds, and if he is an evil doer, he may repent to Allah."<sup>31</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

It is clear from the above discussion that the Islamic ethics plays an important role in the preservation of the quality of a precious environment. Accordingly, human being was entrusted with a responsibility not to behave like an unlimited owner, but to live by Divine teachings, with respect to the preservation of ecological balance. In other words, we are entrusted to follow divine regulations, rights and orders; and not to transgress the measure that has been established by Allah (s.w.t) when dealing with the

---

<sup>26</sup> Muhammad Nazim al-Nasimi, *al-Tibb al-Nabawi wa al-ʿIlm al-Hadith*, 3 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 1991), 1: 135-145; Sayyid ʿAbd Allah Shibar, *Tibb al-A'imma* (Kuwait: Maktabah al-Alfayn, 1990), 91; Thomas P. Hughes, *A Dictionary of Islam* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1986), 622, s.v. suicide.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Nisa' (4): 29.

<sup>28</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr li al-Tibaʿah wa al-Nashr, 1986), 1: 481; Ibn ʿArabi, *Ahkam al-Qur'an*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1988), 1: 524-5; al-Qurtubi, *al-Jamiʿ li Ahkam al-Qur'an*, 20 vols. (Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 1994), 5: 161-2.

<sup>29</sup> Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari*, kitab al-Tibb, Bab Shurb al-Summ wa al-dawa' bihi wama yakhafu minhu wa al-khabith.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Dhahabi, *al-Kaba'ir*, ed. Sayyid Ibrahim (Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 1991), 18-20, 154-5; Ibn Hajral-Haythami, *Fath al-Bari*, 13 vol. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1989), 10: 303-5.

<sup>31</sup> Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari*, Kitab al-Marda, Bab tamanni al-marid al-mawt. See also, al-Qurtubi, *al-Tadhkirah fi Ahwal al-Mawta wa al-Akhirah*, ed. ʿAlam al-Din al-Sababiti (Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, n.d), 3-5.

natural environment. In this sense, the Islamic law should be viewed as preventive medicine. This is because it has broadly preserved the natural environmental elements notably air, water, gardens, agricultural fields and forest, living creatures in the seas and land animals, rivers and spring, fresh and pure air and soil. As a result, the attitude of Islamic law to the environment, the sources of life and the resources of nature is a positive attitude in as much as it is based on protection and prohibition of abuse and destruction; it is also based on construction and development. This positive attitude involves taking measures to improve all aspects of life: hygienic, nutritive and psychological, for man's benefit and maintenance of his welfare and well-being, as well as for the betterment of life for all future generations. Thus, destruction of the environment and the imbalance of nature are not only contrary to the Will of Allah (s.w.t), but they are a form of ingratitude towards His blessings. It also contradicts the principle that one should keep the natural environment in order and balance and not cause environmental harm.