

The Holy Qur'an and the Environmental Crisis

Prof. Dr. Suheyl Umar*

In its root, the existence of the cosmos is tied to the Being who is Necessary through Himself. Hence each part of the cosmos is tied to every other part, and each is an interconnecting link on a chain. When man begins to consider the science of the cosmos, he is taken from one thing to another because of the interrelationships. But in fact, this only happens in the science of the Folk of Allah. Their science does not follow the canon of those of the learned who know only the outward appearances of phenomena. The canon of the Folk of Allah ties together all parts of the cosmos, so they are taken from one thing to another, even if the scholar of outward appearances sees no relationship. This is knowledge of God....

He who knows the Koran and realizes it will know the science of the Folk of Allah. He will know that their science does not enter into limited chapters, nor does it follow the canon of logic, nor can it be weighed by any scale. It is the scale of all scales. (III 200.26)

Most people work contrary to this direct tasting [of the divine things]. That is why their speech is not tied together. He who considers their speech looks for a root to which all their words go back, but he does not find it. But each part of our speech is interrelated with the other parts, since it is one entity, while these things I say are its differentiation. A person will know what I am saying if he knows the interconnection of the verses of the Koran.

Ibn 'Arabī *Futuḥāt* (II 548.15)

Most of the things that are being said about the environmental crisis and the ecosystems could be supported and in fact substantiated by verses in the Holy Qur'an. Particularly as regards to the solution to the problem, the Qur'an contains many crucial lessons. In 1968 Seyyed Hossein Nasr wrote his first work on the environmental crisis *Man and Nature* where he more or less predicted the ecological crisis. Since then, he has written many books on *Tawḥīd*, the key principle in Islam, and the

* Faculty of Information Technology, University of Central Punjab, Lahore & Former Director Iqbal Academy Pakistan.

sanctity of the environment, latest being *Islam and the Order of Nature*. A very important angle on the problem also comes from Martin Lings *The Eleventh Hour*, a book which talks about our present situation in the eleventh hour, the hour preceding the last in which far from simply presenting a negative picture of our cosmic situation, actually shows that in this eleventh hour there are significant countervailing tendencies as to make it a particularly rich, valuable and spiritually beneficial time to be alive.¹

A most important verse in Qur'an in relation to both the crisis we are in and in relation to the deeper meaning of the crisis and what we can do about it is the verse 41 of Surah al-Rum (of the Romans), which says simply, "Corruption has appeared on earth and at sea because of what the hands of men have wrought; in order that God may make them taste the consequences of their actions; so that they might return" [so that they might return to God].

What we see around us today is just what the Qur'an describes in terms of *fasād* (corruption). This would have been understood at the time it was revealed to the Arabs of the 7th century as moral corruption, or disobedience. However, it would have been hard to apply the term in that era to the kind of corruption which we see today 'on earth and at sea'; and the terms *fasād* in a global sense, that is, the kind of pollution we are facing now everywhere, on the land and at sea, because of what our hands have wrought, the consequences of our own actions, our predecessors' actions. This verse tells us that we are to 'taste' the consequences of our actions— and those of our predecessors; for God wishes us to return to Him all the more resolutely, on the basis of tasting the consequences of our actions.

Three themes could be derived from this one verse. The first theme is based on a comment that the environmental crisis could not have

¹ The basic thesis of that book is that in the eleventh hour, according to the parable in the Bible given by Christ, the wages of those who worked for just the one hour were the same as those who worked in the heat of the day and they were paid first. Martin Lings draws out the significance of this in cosmic terms that the availability of Divine mercy increases in proportion to the very difficulty, the darkness of the age, as the end approaches. So that's another angle of approach to this problem.

happened in a world fashioned by a conception of the Islamic conception of *Tawḥīd*. In the second, I hope to go into the question of human responsibility and cosmic pollution generally. And in the third, I shall discuss some aspects of the solution.

As regards this principle of *Tawḥīd*, we really should translate as 'integrating Oneness' rather than simply as 'unity'. *Tawḥīd*, the basic principle of Islam has to be translated as integrating Oneness, that makes One, realises One. And this Oneness is to be understood not just on the level of the Divine; there is one God as opposed to many gods. It is also to be understood on the level of Reality. There is one Reality that encompasses all that is, penetrates all that is. We are moving from a theological conception of unity to an ontological conception of unity, not just a question of one God, but one Being, one Reality. And this is not just the speculation of the mystics, the Sufis in Islam; it is based completely on key Qur'anic verses which indicate this in a very explicit manner.

The Sufis are the ones who have brought to light the spiritual and metaphysical significance of this Oneness. It is in the Qur'an and in the sayings of the Prophet that one finds the true roots of this perception, the conception. And one of the most important sayings of the Prophet called *ḥadīth qudsī* where God speaks in the first person is this: "I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known so I created."

The hidden treasure loving to be known becomes this entire cosmos. And the Qur'anic verses that most explicitly refer to this manifestation of this hidden treasure are ones which talk about God being the First and the Last, the *awwal* and the *ākhir*, the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin*, the outwardly manifest and the inwardly hidden. So, this outwardly manifest aspect of God, the *ẓāhir* aspect of God is the one that has given rise to the most fruitful speculations and reflections because it is clear to most people using their intellect that God must be the origin of all things. The Divine Reality must be the end of all things; the Divine Reality is hidden within all things.

But how is God manifest through all things as well as being hidden in all things? That outward manifestation of God has helped the Sufis to see that there is nothing in reality, nothing in existence, but God. The

whole of the cosmos is penetrated by the divine reality such that according to another beautiful verse in the Holy Qur'an (2:115): "Unto God belong the East and the West. So wherever ye turn, there is the face of God."

You cannot turn anywhere without seeing the face of God; the face of God reflected in the mirrors of creation, one might add, as an interpretive comment thereupon. But this ability to see the fact of God implies also the ability to see that the surface on which the face of God is reflected, the surface of the mirror, the cosmos upon which the face of God is reflected is itself doomed to extinction. 'Everything perishes except God's face: *kullu shay'in hālikun illa wajhahu*.

The natural domain within which God is reflected in and through everything, that natural domain in and of itself is of a perishing nature. It's a container which cannot but disintegrate at some point in the future and in fact the Qur'an puts it more mysteriously because it says everything *is* perishing not that it will perish: *kullu shay'in hālikun*.

Therefore, the nature of the cosmos is transience, it is in a process of decomposing even while you think it is apparently stable. And the face of God, the reality of God, alone subsists.

Here we have this ambiguity within the cosmos: there is the Divine Content, which is imperishable, and the cosmic container, which is evanescent. How does one, then, decipher this Divine Content and go from the relative to the absolute? The Qur'an here gives us many indications that the phenomena of nature are to be grasped as 'āyāt', as verses of the scripture themselves. The very phenomena of nature are given the same term 'āyāt which literally means a word or sign.

This word is polyvalent. It means both a miracle and a verse of scripture, on the one hand, but it also has a natural connotation, which is of phenomenon of virgin nature and a subjective phenomenon within the soul. The Qur'an (41:53) makes it clear, "We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and in their own souls until it becomes clear to them that He or It is the Truth."

And the word is *āyātīn, sanurihim āyātīnā*. We will show them Our signs in the virgin nature all around you and in your own souls until it

becomes clear to you that God is reality. So the signs are both inward and outward and here we have an expression of what is fundamental to Islamic spirituality: the idea of man as microcosm, which the soul, and even the human body, expresses is a principle of which the whole cosmos is, likewise, one expression. What is within is also without. And this is one aspect of the key to the solution to the environmental crisis to be understood microcosmically and macrocosmically. How to start to put things right? We will come to that in the third part of the discussion.

But this idea of the whole of the universe as being a cosmic book is a perception and conception in the Qur'an known as '*takwīnī*'. There are two types of Qur'an: one is the Qur'an *tadwīnī* which is the written Qur'an and the other is the Qur'an *takwīnī* which is the creational Qur'an, the Qur'an which consists of the whole of creation, so that all the signs of virgin nature can be grasped as so many verses.

And this takes us very close to the conception of the cosmos as scripture as contained within the Native American tradition. For the Native Americans, the cosmos is the revelation, the whole cosmos is a world of signs: the stars, the trees, the animals. All of these are given a sacramental significance, as they are in the Qur'an—witness the number of times God Himself swears by the phenomena of virgin nature: '*By the Sun and her brightness*'; '*By the Night when it enshroudeeth*', etc. The Qur'an is absolutely remarkable for the range and depth and subtlety with which it makes reference to the phenomena of virgin nature so that we have chapter headings such as: 'The Bee', 'The Star', 'The Moon', the Sun and so on and so forth, which invite people to contemplate, to meditate, to reflect on the signs of virgin nature as being expressions of the Divine creativity and, ultimately, of sanctity and, therefore, divinity for ultimately there is no sanctity or divinity outside God.

'The environmental crisis could not have happened in a universe fashioned by the Qur'anic view of nature', this is an incontrovertible fact. We could not conceive of a small group of scientists breaking away from a community of believers who had instilled into them the sense of the holiness of virgin nature. And this holiness is not just an abstract holiness. It was a concrete one. The Qur'an dominated the thinking and

the being of the Muslims as it still does for the overwhelming majority at least, if not all, of Muslims today.

When the Qur'an tells us '*in min shay'in illa yusabbiḥu bi-ḥamdihi*': There is no thing which does not hymn the praise of the Lord. It is easy for the outsiders to point to this and say this is a sort of philosophical abstract ideal. It becomes very concrete as soon as you see that in so many of the other verses we are told specifically about the phenomena of nature and we have this remarkable verse, which tells us, sort of a rhetorical question, "Do you not see (*alam tara ana Allaha yusabbiḥu laḥū*) that everything that is in the heavens and the earth praises God?" (Al-Qur'an, 24:41)

And then, just as you think that this may be an abstract philosophical idea that everything by virtue of its existence praises its creator, the Qur'an tells us about the birds, a graphic image of the birds in flight. Then you have to read it, when you are reciting these words, in such a way that it makes it onomatopoeic: '*wa 'l-tayru ṣāffātin; kullun qad 'alima ṣalātahū wa tasbīḥah*' 'And the birds in flight, each one knows its prayer and its mode of praise.

One cannot get away with any abstract philosophical idea. One has the metaphysics of it expressed and then the concrete image of it, the birds being the most wonderful example to be given here and symbolic of the higher spiritual states. The birds, whose very flight indicates the defying of gravity, therefore, something supernatural. The birds that can sing— and what sound is more moving to us human beings than bird-song amongst the sounds of animate creatures? The birds are a wonderful image, wonderful symbols given to us, of the prayer and glorification of nature.

All of the creatures, however, are called *ummah*. They are all given the title *ummah*. There is a verse in the Qur'an (6:38) that says, "There is not an animal on earth nor a flying creature with wings but they are peoples, Ummah, they are peoples like yourself."

And then to make this concrete as well, we have this verse, which tells us: 'Your Lord has inspired the bee' it is inspired to seek its habitations in the mountains and forests and to produce its honey, to seek

sustenance from the flowers and produces from its belly that which is a healing, *shifā'*, a mercy for human beings.

Even the bee receives revelation from God. Revelation here meaning that instinct that is given to all natural creatures to do by nature what we, as human beings, have to learn to do through supernatural revelation. We learn from these creatures, all of whom can be regarded as inspired beings: that is, beings inspired by their Lord.

Therefore the loss of any kind of species, any kind of creatures, is according to the Qur'an a catastrophe. It is an *umamah*, it is not just some accidental creature of evolution the loss of which may be somehow justified by a greater cause of our progress in the evolutionary state.

So, God is not only the creator of the cosmos, *ex nihilo*, from nothing. The Divine creativity also inhabits the cosmos, as it were *in principio*, in the principle, and not just 'in the beginning'. There is nothing that evades this principle. What is it about the divine Names and Qualities that indicate this most explicitly?

It is the divine Name *Al-Muḥīṭ*: that which encompasses. *Muḥīṭ* also means the 'environment'. So when we talk about the environmental crisis, we talk about a crisis that afflicts the very nature of the content of this divine environment. The environment which is, implicitly, divine. The crisis afflicting this environment is a crisis that goes to the very root of the *malaise*, which has to be dealt with on its own level and not just the level of practical solutions.

Thus, the first message deriving from the Qur'an is that a crisis that is as all-encompassing as the environmental crisis which afflicts the spiritual, moral and physical aspects of our being can only be dealt with, addressed, in the first instance and then resolved with the grace of God through a series of perspectives which, likewise, are all-encompassing, which, likewise, is organic and this is what the meaning of *Tawḥīd* is all about; the interconnectedness of all phenomena in this Oneness of divine Reality.

We could ask that if this was the purpose of creation, to manifest the divine treasure, the hidden treasure and for God to manifest His love and

creativity, then what went wrong? How did we find ourselves in this terrible mess?

This part of the discussion is, 'From universal praise to human abuse'. And the simple answer to the question of what went wrong is to be found in the story of Adam, the fall of Adam and Eve from the Garden. This is a dramatization of the principle which we are now seeing, as it were, the outward manifestation because the main use that Adam made of his God-given gift of freedom and intelligence was this freedom to seek eternity on the plane of transience. The way in which Satan, *Iblīs* the serpent, lures Adam and Eve out of the paradise is to say to them: 'Shall I show you a tree of immortality and a kingdom that will never fade away?'

And the implication here is that the only sin that Adam can be capable of in this phase of our existence, he had everything he could possibly wish, but was capable of disobeying the one order he was given by God. Now it is important to remember that Adam can be taken as a synecdoche, and stands for the whole of humanity. Thus, the story of Adam's fall from paradise is the story of every individual's fall from grace into disgrace.

Adam's choice was for eternity. Adam was aware of the beauty, of the sanctity of the Garden but at a certain moment he becomes aware that this is not eternal. And it is the only thing that Satan can use to lure him out of this paradisaical bliss, "don't you want this to last forever?" "don't you want eternal life, don't you want to become an angel?". He promises Adam and Eve "I will give you the secret of immortality and eternity."

And this interpretation is a basic Sufi one, but the Qur'an also helps us to see the relevance of this interpretation to our present situation and how one does not have to look back at some sin, a particular sin, that was committed by a particular human being in the industrial or scientific revolution that gave rise to these awful consequences. One can see a general tendency, a general worldliness, which the Qur'an expresses in this wonderfully powerful verse, truly man is intense in his love for good [i.e. he goes too far in this love for good things of this world].

He desires good but his love for that good has taken him far from that good. This *shidda*, this intensity is a caricature of the aspiration we should have for Paradise: and what can we say is that this love manifests a desire for paradise, for eternity, for divinity here and now for the ego in its fallen state rather than in its sanctified state, and within this world rather than the next one. It is a forgetting of the difference of level between this domain and the domain of the hereafter, between the ego as insatiable desire and the saint as pure love.

This fall from grace is a bad use of our human freedom, that responsibility which was given to us in contrast to all other creatures. There is a verse in the Qur'an, which says, 'We offered the *amānah*, the trust (which is implicitly the responsibility, the freedom, the freedom to go against God as well as the freedom to conform to God) to the heavens and the earth but they shrank from it in fear, but man took up this trust'. And then it adds that man was ever a tyrant and a fool: *zālim* and *jahūl*, someone who will eventually use this freedom to go against the very source from which this freedom emanates.

This is the drama that will unfold as human beings go against the *fiṭrah*, the primordial nature, as they go against the conformity to the divine pattern and exercising their freedom in a negative way choosing worldliness over spirituality and exercising a freedom of will for the sake of the perishing, for the sake of manipulation of the nature as opposed to a reverence for the nature which is the basic conception animating all the Muslims from the artists and philosophers and craftsmen and scientists.

It should be noted in Seyyed Hossein Nasr's book that the majority of the scientists in the Muslim world were also mystically inclined; who could not step out of this framework in seeing God everywhere and in everything. For them, it would have been an anathema to view nature as anything but sacred; they could not have de-sacramentalised, de-sacralised it, emptying the cosmos of this divine content such as to start manipulating it simply for the sake of human benefit, for the sake of commercial gain or whatever else it may be. That is why the ecological crisis could never have happened in a world dominated by an Islamic, a Qur'anic, conception of the universe.

This *amānah*, this trust, we can see as having been betrayed. And this leads us back to the verse quoted in start, that “Corruption has appeared on the earth and at sea because of what mans’ hands have wrought.” (Al-Qur’an, 30:41)

Now there are many extraordinary verses that help us to go from an apparent, irremediable, cosmic dissolution, which induces a sense of impotence on our part, to a perception of the ever-present possibility of a restoration on the part of man, thus, imbuing him with a restitution of the sense of personal responsibility.

Many verses of the Holy Qur’an help us effect this transformation of consciousness. In America there are psychiatrists and therapists who have to specialise in dealing with traumas generated by the environmental crisis, a new kind of psychic affliction. People are more and more aware of the devastating nature of the crisis we are facing, but they are immobilised by a sense of impotence: what on earth can I do about it—they ask? The Qur’an helps each and every one of us to see the inalienable relationship between human responsibility and cosmic wellbeing, however large the consequences of the past actions of humanity be writ on the cosmic scale.

You cannot go very far in any of the *surahs* of the Qur’an dealing with the end of time, with the Day of Judgement, with the Resurrection, before coming across this issue of individual human responsibility. When we look around us and see what is happening, there are many Muslims who say that we are in the eleventh hour, as Martin Lings put it, but what has always to be stressed before we go into any negative evaluation, is that when the Prophet himself was asked when will the Hour come (he was asked this by the angel Gabriel who came to him in human form), the Prophet said, “The questioner knows as little about this as the questioned”. In other words, no one knows when the Hour will come.

However, the Prophet did say when he was asked what are the signs, the *ishārāt*, the Prophet said that among the signs are that the slave girl of God will give birth to her mistress and the naked herdsmen of the desert will suddenly compete with each other in building tall buildings; and the angel Gabriel said, “You have spoken the truth.”

What we can understand from this is that on one hand, the signs are there. What has happened in the last generation in the Arabian Peninsula as regards the Bedouins suddenly competing with each other in the manner described? In fact if anyone has gone to Dubai, it really is not that far from the literal truth. There are competitions as to who can build the tallest buildings.

Now we see this happening around us. But the Qur'an and hadith give Muslims no justification for despair or despondency; because the more one sees the signs of the impending end of this world, the more you are given an encouragement to do whatever is possible within the sphere of your own competence, the sphere of your own power, to rectify the situation—because you are a microcosm, a 'little world'; the whole of the world is, in some way, affected by you just as you are affected by the world.

And this restores to the individual an inalienable, personal sense of responsibility, however bleak the outer world, the macrocosm, may appear to be. This environmental crisis may prefigure the end of this cycle, the signs that we see around us can be seen as pre-figurations of the end but, by no means, can they be simply equated to 'the end'. The view which emerges here is one of hope as well as realism. Yes, we may well be caught up in a process of dissolution, but no, we are not impotent: there is always something we can and must do in the face of these crises. The Qur'an never lets you stray into hopelessness, or despair, because the more you see the 'signs' of the end of the world, the more you train your focus on what you, individually, must do about your world: the signs rebound upon yourself.

Here are few examples amongst many that can be given regarding the relationship between cosmic collapse or implosion and human resolve and individual conscience.

The first example of this is the *Surah al-Zilzāl*, 'The Earthquake', an appropriate *surah* with which to begin given that England has just had its first significant earthquake in many years. And it is interesting to see the reactions of people here who have not been used to this kind of thing and compare it to the people in Pakistan in the recent earthquake there, where precisely this kind of anxiety, this terror about a 5.2 shake of the earth

here, the terror it induced in people who have very little sense of eternity in contrast with what happened in Pakistan where the devastation is still not known in all its entirety, how many thousands of people were killed and terribly injured and then to see the resilience and response of these people to get back into their lives, to start re-building and to say: this was the will of God. Their perception of the mercy of God always took precedence over their perception of this terrible manifestation of the will of God; and there was a sense of soul-searching: “Is there some sense in which we could have been responsible for what happened?” However ludicrous this may seem to the western mentality, it is perfectly natural that every time a catastrophe happens in the Muslim world, the individual says: could I have somehow contributed to the psychic *malaise*, which led to sins, which may have led to this divine punishment?

It is never far from the mind of the sensitive Muslim, who is looking into his or her soul constantly to seek within him or herself, to see whether there is a relationship, even if it is not as simple as that of cause and effect. There is a relationship between what we do and what happens to the world. And as I said there are so many examples of this relationship in the Qur’an, of this intricate and subtle relationship between individual act and cosmic effect.

When the earth is shaken with her final shaking

And the earth yieldeth up her burdens

And man sayeth what aileth her

That day she will relate her news, her chronicles

Because thy Lord inspired her

That day mankind will issue forth in scattered groups to be shown their deeds

And whoso doeth good, an atom’s weight, will see it then

And whoso doeth ill, an atom’s weight, will see it then

(Al-Qur’an, The surah al- Zilzāl)

Therefore, we are taken from this vision of the final earthquake that will afflict the earth, to mother earth actually speaking, the spirit of this planet, speaking and saying what had happened to her because the Lord has inspired her. Every single people, every single species on earth, is an *ummah*, now the earth has a vessel, absorbing all of these actions, all of these intentions, all of these aspirations good or bad that we, as the human race, have imposed upon her. This is now what is going to be told to the whole of humanity.

It is a very powerful *surah* and the message is almost as much in the sound as it is in the meaning.

That's the first part, because the Lord inspired her. Now see how the rhythm changes. That day mankind comes forth in droves to see their actions. That's the shift in the rhythm. Everything up until that point is cosmic; earth is shaking, man is terrified, what has happened to her, how is she speaking, how has the Lord inspired her? And then the rhythm changes and mankind comes forth to see their acts. Whoever has done an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever has done an atom's weight of evil will see it.

It is an atom's weight, the tiniest portion of our action that can be measured in some intangible manner. This is what the Qur'an is getting at, one goes from a vision of the entire earth shaking and being ground to dust to a vision of each particle of our own actions, each particle, being evaluated, this being the polar opposite of the vision of cosmic dissolution. We have gone from the cosmic to the individual, from apparent dissolution to individual resolution.

There are some more examples to bring home this point because the Qur'anic *surahs*, the chapters that deal with the Resurrection, with the Hereafter never let us fall into any kind of despair or despondency. On the contrary it is all about taking responsibility for our action and doing something about it here and now, when we can, without waiting until it is too late and we can't.

When the Heaven is cleft asunder

When the planets are dispersed

When the seas are poured forth

And the sepulchres are overturned

The soul will know what it has brought forth, and what it has left behind. (Al-Qur'an, Surah al-Infitar)

There are several other examples that can be quoted. Like one, which is remarkable, called 'the Folding up'. Each of these verses appears to be a statement, a description of the end but also a very accurate description of what we are doing right now. Surah at-Takwīr: "When the sun is folded up, enfolded". We have an image of that in the very reality of nuclear weapons, literally, the folding up of the power of the sun into these subatomic particles. "And the stars fall"; Here the Arabic is '*inkawarat*' meaning difficult to see, dust-covered; "When the mountains are made to move"; One has only to go to Mecca and Medina to see the reality of that; places where there were hills are now flattened. "When the camels pregnant with young are abandoned"; A ten-month pregnant camel, the most valuable object for the Arab in the desert, when this ten-month pregnant camel is abandoned, it can be taken as a symbol of the abandonment of the most valuable treasures of virgin nature; "When the wild beasts are herded together." Almost a description of the fact that we now have zoos. Where are the wild animals? In zoos, not in the wild. "When the seas rise"; *Sujjirat* literally means to rise but it also means to swell because of the heat that generates the swelling. Again, even if Al Gore's 'An Inconvenient Truth' is not also an incontrovertible truth, there is apparently scientific evidence to say that carbon emissions are not responsible for rising temperatures; nevertheless the Qur'an is describing a state of swelling up of the seas through heat, a very accurate description of what is happening right now. "And when the souls are brought together"; And suddenly again we have this symbol that comes right back to the individual act, a sinful act that was committed against one particular individual is given here for rhetorical effect. After saying: look at all these things that are happening, when the end comes, when all these things fold in on each other, when the seas rise, animals are herded together, souls are re-united, then you are hit with a particular sin. "When the one who is buried alive (the female baby who is buried alive) is asked for what sin was she killed?"; And this would have pricked the conscience of the Arabs to such an extent that you can hardly imagine it.

We are talking about this final end, the cosmos breaks down but then one particular individual girl who was killed because she was a girl in the pre-Islamic days, this is one of the most barbaric customs that the Arabs had, when they did not feel like having another girl or a girl as their first born, they would bury her alive. It was one of the first things that Islam prohibited with severity.

The rhythm and intensity of this is really unimaginable if you are not an Arabic speaker. That you are suddenly taken from these cosmic events to a particular stage of death where you have every single one of your acts questioned in the light of this cosmic dissolution. It is one of the most remarkable surahs of the Qur'an and it goes on.

When the pages are laid open
And the sky is torn away
And hell is ignited
And when Paradise is brought close
The soul will know what it has made present
(Al-Qur'an, 81:10-14)

What will be present for it at that moment, when all these things happen, the soul will know what it has made present for itself. That is the time of reckoning.

Talking of reckoning, we come to the last example, which is the *Surah al-Qiyāmah*, 'The chapter of the Resurrection'. Here we have the subtlety of the Islamic conception of Judgement, of Resurrection because the chapter opens by an oath. God swears. "I swear" He says, by the day of Resurrection, by the day of Judgement. And then immediately after that, "I swear by the accusing soul". In other words, the soul whose conscience has become enlivened and therefore accuses itself of its misdeeds and has embarked upon, what is called in Islamic spirituality, the greater Holy war, the *jihād al-akbar*, the war against one's own failings.

And here we have an indication of the real meaning of 'Judgement'. We move from the conception of God, anthropomorphically, casting judgement upon every one of us to an ontological conception of a

judgement, a judgement inherent in the nature of being. Being judges, us, through our own conscience.

Verse 14 is a commentary on another verse, which tells us that on the Day of Judgement each and every one of us will be told “Here is your book”, read your own book.

“On this day your soul suffices unto thee as a judge, as a reckoner.”

One does not need some extrinsic being. Here we have a conception of judgement as that immanent restoration of equilibrium; each and every soul can be aware of what is necessary, given its own state of the soul, in light of the actions he has performed and the intentions and attitudes that he has manifested; each soul knows what is necessary to restore the balance.

That is what the microcosm/macrocosm analogy is all about. When we said at the beginning, “Corruption has appeared on land and at sea because of what man’s hands have done; that He may make them taste the consequences of their actions; that they may return.” One can understand this return to imply a return to your senses: come back and judge yourself, before you are yourselves judged, as the Prophet said.

Finally the question of what the solution is. This study is not about to embark on any global solutions, it just reveals that the microcosmic solution cannot be separated from the macrocosmic one. There are obvious things given to us, injunctions, recommendations, by environmentalists, scientists on what we can do and it is up to each one of us to do what little we can in our own way of changing our own actions and lifestyles, and this is completely in accord with the Qur’anic emphasis on conservation, on the sanctity of nature, on the necessity of frugality, on the avoidance of extravagance, of waste. We are told in several verses of the Qur’an: “Eat and drink the good things that God has provided you” ‘*Halālan ṭayyiban*’ which is often forgotten in Islamic discourse when it comes to food and drink. *Halal* means it has to be licit but what does *ṭayyib* mean? A translation, which would fit perfectly in today’s context, is ‘organic’; good and wholesome. *Ṭayyib* simply means good and wholesome and not just legal. In today’s context it means food

that has not been contaminated, food that is organic. We have that in the Qur'an just as we have '*la tusrifu*': Do not be extravagant, do not waste.

You have also in the example of the Prophet and this is the place where if one wanted to conduct a programme of environmental ethics, one would have to go from the Qur'anic theory to Prophetic practice. How these things were actually put into practice. The Prophet said when you make your ablution for prayer and you are next to a river and the river is flowing with water, do not use any water more than is absolutely necessary for your ablution even if there is an abundance and the river is re-generating itself constantly. It is an attitude of mind that you have to have as regards the water as a precious, as a divine, resource. Don't be wasteful; don't be extravagant in letting even a few drops of that water fall.

One may think that it is being exaggerated about everybody in the Islamic world having an inherent understanding of the sanctity of nature but a way of appreciating this is by describing a story of Mulla Naseruddin, one of the figures on whom jokes are made in this tradition. He is a wise man who often disguises his wisdom through apparent acts of foolishness and in this particular story the message comes through of the sanctity of nature and this story goes back about 800 or 900 years.

The story is that the Mulla is running while it is raining and people say to him 'Mulla why are you running to get out of the rain? Don't you know that rain is a mercy from God?' Mulla says, 'I know rain is a mercy from God and I am running because I don't want to tread on the mercy from God'. Even if the aim is to be humorous here, the joke itself reveals the psychological conditions of Islamic culture, even in those times people knew that the mercy and grace of God manifested by natural phenomena like rain, was not something to take lightly. It was there in every phenomena and act of nature; water being the most potent image of this, being referred to as a *rahma* or merciful grace.

When the Prophet said to his companions don't waste a drop of river water even if you are by a river, he was indicating a whole series of similar actions, which are eminently within our sphere of possibility. He also said to his companions "Do not make your stomachs graveyards for

the animals.” This means don’t indulge in this over-eating of animals. Eat more vegetables, cultivating them yourselves.

If we think about an example of fasting, in addition to fasting the thirty days of Ramadan as it is for the Muslims, people who follow the Prophet’s example fast two days in each week, how much could be saved if Muslims followed that Sunnah alone of fasting two days a week, one is getting a sense of the kind of moderate austerity, mild asceticism that should be the framework for every Muslim and, by extension, for all those who look to the Qur’an and Prophet’s examples for inspiration.

The practical side of what Muslims can do to look in the Qur’an and the Prophet’s conduct on how they should act, how they should conserve all the resources that are made available to them. But the basic principle is the microcosm has repercussions on the macrocosm. What we do within our souls affects our environment and the Qur’an gives us this verse as a substantiation of those other ones, the interpretation of, “Truly God will not change the condition of a people until they change the condition of their own souls.” (Al-Qur’an, 13:11)

That means that the macrocosmic solution can never be divorced from the change that is required at the individual level whether our actions at the individual level generates enough critical mass to serve as a magnet, as it were, to attract the mercy and grace of God. It is not for us to speculate. All we can do is give ourselves to these simple outward acts, of austerity, conservation, mild asceticism in doing what we can for the environment whilst realising that our rectification of our own faults morally, our own ingratitude, our own persistence of simple acts generally cannot be divorced from our outward acts of purifying the environment or purifying our actions in relation to the environment.

There is a physical level, a moral level and a spiritual level and these are all connected. If we are not able to work directly on our souls to, as it were, get rid of the vices that give rise to the outward pollution of the environment then we will not be able to get rid of our outward actions. But to go to the spiritual root of these problem is what we are invited to do by the Qur’an and Sunnah.

These virtues can all be summed up in the word '*faqr*' which means spiritual poverty, an emptiness and a detachment with regard to the world. In this context there is a saying of the Prophet which is quite relevant. He said that "My family are like Noah's ark. Whoever enters this ark will be saved and whoever leaves it will be perished."

This could be interpreted in many ways. One of the ways in which I would interpret it is that one of the great virtues associated with the Prophet's family, in particular with his daughter Fatima, is '*zuhd*' (asceticism) which can be translated as being in the world whilst deeming it of little value, not to deem the contents of the world of little value but to deem the world as such to be of little value: the content of the world is sacred, ultimately divine, but the world as such is perishing, it is transient.

What this meant for the '*ahl al bayt*', the household of the Prophet, was to always put spiritual virtue, spiritual benefit, over and above material benefit. And that is one of the key inversions that is required in our current situation for us to put the situation right, to understand that the world is perishing and it is through our detachment from the world as a perishing entity. We are more able to give reverence to the world as a sacred content and this leads us to note the following paradox: At the very time when western thought was moving away from God and heaven and towards man and earth, this was precisely the time when the earth was subject to its most violent assaults. At precisely the moment in history when men started to try to make heaven on earth, or make the earth a heaven, this was when earth began to become hellish. Therefore, what we need to see is an inversion of this: we need to see the world as such not as heaven but as containing heavenly archetypes which are manifested on earth; and we will see those archetypes more clearly if we are able to sense the 'metaphysical transparency' of the world. The more we are detached from the world on the level of its own manifestation, the more we attach ourselves to its content which transcends the level of manifestation.

In conclusion discussing about the spiritual side of the solution, these are all very practical measures but there is a saying of the Prophet which leads to the efficacy of spiritual action, inward action.

[An aside, after drinking from some water and saying the *Basmallah*: When the Prophet would drink a glass of water, he would say the *Basmallah* “*Bismillahi rahman ar rahim*” and he would drink sipping, once, twice and then he would drink as much as he needed, again to indicate that we are not animals, that when we drink water we do not just gobble it down like thoughtless creatures. We drink it to satisfy our needs. We gratefully take it, we give thanks and we show that we are in control of our lower appetites.

He said a very important statement about the approaching end. And this is both action and contemplation. This is on the level of the spirit. He said two things: ‘The last day, the day of Judgement, will not come for as long as there is someone on earth saying *Allah, Allah.*’

In other words the invocation of the divine Name; and this invocation is of course not restricted to simply the name ‘*Allah*’ in Arabic, you can also talk about it as a universal principle, the essence of the prayer in all the traditions known to us on this planet is the invocation of a divine Name. In Hinduism, Japa Yoga, in Christianity, the Jesus prayer, the Japanese Buddhist Nembutsu, even the perpetual orison of the Native American tradition; the quintessence of prayer is the repetition of the divine Name.

Here is an indication of the relationship between spiritual action and cosmic sustenance. The cosmos is sustained by spiritual action, by rites and rituals, by prayers and invocations that all of us perform. There is an intrinsic relationship between us performing that function for which we were created, just as the birds and animals are all singing the praises of God, so we were created for that purpose, essentially, to pray to God, to benefit from His gifts and to go back to Him, spiritually, inwardly. The verse in the Qur’an (51:56) that expresses this very clearly is, “I did not create mankind or the jinn except that they should worship me.”

This worship and this act of invocation is a purification of oneself at the same time as being a contribution to the sustenance of the environment. He has also said that when you see the Hour approaching, when you think you see the Hour approaching, we could add, because no one knows for certain when the Hour is approaching, but when you see the Hour approaching, and you are planting a tree, continue with the

planting of the tree. Don't ever think that your action is of no consequence simply because you think that the end is approaching. The planting of the tree is to be performed, completed because it can bear consequences above and beyond your imagination, so continue with that act. Now between the planting of the tree which is a material image and the utterance of the invocation, *Allah, Allah* there is a very subtle relationship because the Qur'an tells us: 'A good word is as a good tree'. And this image that the Qur'an gives us of the effect of the divine invocation, invocation of the divine Name, in relation to a tree is a very instructive one. In the *surah* called Abraham, it says: 'Do you not see how God strikes similitudes? A good word is as a good tree. Its roots are firm and its branches reach up into heaven. It gives forth its fruits in every season, perpetually, by the leave of its Lord.'

Here we have a combination of a very natural image with the practice of the invocation. Because, as the Sufis have understood the impact of the invocation to be like this tree, that the roots of the divine Name are firm within the divine ground, the ultimate Reality. The branches, the repercussions of this invocation reach up into heaven so that our act on earth of planting a tree, uttering the Name, being like a good tree has repercussions like the branches that go up into Heaven, and remember the birds also sing in those high branches. The branches going up to heaven, the repercussions cannot be quantified, cannot be measured. And the fruits come forth in every season. Therefore, the fruits of good action and the best action being the invocation cannot, in any sense, be minimised. The fruits of this good action; prayer and of contributing in some small way to the environment can have consequences over and above our own measurements, our own power of measurement.

And so it is on that note of optimism based on realism of where we stand that, the invocation and its relationship to the natural world is not, by any means, confined within Islam. It is something that is found in all of the traditions and, in a sense, it is an expression of the truth that the whole of creation is the utterance of God, the word of God, the Name of God. The Name is always an expression of the Named. When the human being within the world utters the divine Name, that human being is

integrating himself within the divine Nature and thereby the whole of creation participates in that re-integration. And that's the meaning that Platonic philosophy brings home so clearly, and is found expressed also in all the major spiritual traditions of the world: the microcosm is a small world. When correctly understood, this means that when you correct yourself, this actions has repercussions that ripple throughout the whole universe.

This is expressed most beautifully by a great sage Ramana Mahārishī, when one of his disciples came to him and said 'I am trying to realise myself in accordance with your teachings, but what about the world, how can I improve the state of the world?' And the Ramana looked at his disciple and said:

'You are the world.'