

Sermons

Compiled by Greater Washington Interfaith Power and Light

Below are several sermons that make the connection between the ethical dimensions of our faith traditions and the problem of global warming. GWIPL hopes to add new sermons, particularly those delivered in the Greater Washington area, over time. Please send an email to daniel@gwipl.org if you would like to suggest an appropriate sermon you delivered or heard.

Table of Contents

Jewish: Global Warming or Hot Air – Rabbi Daniel Swartz

Christian: Ecology is Religious – Rev. Sally Bingham

Islamic: Global Warming – Dr. Metwalli B. Amer

Global Warming or Hot Air A Jewish Perspective on Changing the Climate of our Faith

Rabbi Daniel Swartz

Tishrei 5760 – September, 1999

Pennsylvania

Hurricanes, even ones with winds as relatively serene as Irene, inevitably bring to mind a key religious metaphor for climate change. As Nancy Reagan might have said, “Just say Noah.” Especially with this most recent spate of droughts and storms, it’s time for us to imagine ourselves for a moment in that ark of old, our entire habitat consisting of just so many cubits of gopher wood. What would be the rules of behavior in our ark-world that God might wish us to observe; and what might such rules tell us about our behavior in that none-too-large ark that we call, depending on our background, the biosphere or God’s good creation?

I want to share with you a Sabbath-cycle of seven lessons that our faith can teach us about how to live in this planetary ark of ours, how to repair its rafters, how to move amidst its decks in harmony. And once this message is laid out, I want to see where it might take us, how we might embark on our journey together. So I’ll try to get us starting on our task of this afternoon – what should we be doing as people of faith? It’s daunting – but together, we can ride out the storm and sail homeward. Along the way, we’ll learn not just how to think about global warming, but how we can create a better future for all the inhabitants of our ark.

First, **this ark is good**. In fact, God’s very first role in Torah is as a Creator whose work, the whole universal ark, is overflowing with goodness: “And God saw all that God had made, and found it very good.” (Genesis 1:31). And while we should not think we are at the center of it all, we can center ourselves in that goodness. After a conference a few years ago in Estes Park that a few of you might also have attended, I was hiking in Rocky Mountain National Park, near some of the glaciers that are fast disappearing with the warming of our climate. In the right sunlight, glacial ice

is this incredibly vivid blue, refracting light more beautifully than stained glass. The bright spring sun shone on this huge, ancient, cracked and crevassed cliff, with the wind swirling and the ice rumbling and moaning as it moved at a pace that defines slowness. Then suddenly I heard a whirrrr -- and right by my ear buzzed a tiny broad tailed hummingbird, its throat gleaming iridescent red and violet. Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav noted, that the smallest hand held before the eye can obscure the largest mountain. It is time for all of us to view life, to view God's glorious ark, unobscured.

Second, within this good ark, **we humans have a special role that requires a special balance and harmony**: "The Lord God took and placed the human in the Garden of Eden, to till and to tend it." (Genesis 2:15). Now let me be rabbinic for a moment and look a bit more closely at these two words, till and tend, *avad* and *shamar* in Hebrew, respectively. *Avad* means to work, yes, even to work the land in an agricultural sense. But the more common biblical usage of the word is for service, to serve someone, often God. Prayer services are called *avodah she-ba-lev*, the service of the heart. *Shamar* is usually translated as to guard or protect -- and *Shomrim*, stewards, protect that which is not their own, that which has been placed in trust with them by the true owner, in this case, God.

But yes, though we are not the owners of all, we are different from most of the other tenants. We argue and debate our roles; we have the ability to act morally -- and immorally, to choose right or wrong. And we have power in greater measure than any other species on our planetary home. So, having the might do we assume this power as a right? Instead of a mighty church organ, we might be better off thinking of our role as being part of a small jazz combo. Imagine rocks and other non-living parts of our environment, as the drummer, keeping the beat that life moves to. Plants are the bass, steadily growing toward the sun, driving us forward. Other animals might be the piano -- elephants sounding the bass clef, sparrows the treble. And us -- we might be the lead --perhaps, given the present administration, a saxophone. Yes, the lead could overpower the other instruments -- but if that is the case, the music is at best boring and at worst downright irritating. A good soloist lays down a lick, and then lays off, while the rhythm propels us on and on. I like to think this is what the Psalmist -- after all, an early Jazz harpist -- had in mind in writing Psalm 148. Yes, it says that young men and maidens, the old together with the youths, sing praises to God. But so does the earth, so do the sea-giants and all the watery depths. Fire and Hail, snow and fog, stormy winds fulfill God's word. Mountains and hills, fruit trees and cedars, wild beasts and cattle, crawling things and winged fowl all sing their praises, too. We are part of a greater harmony -- and our job, our sacred task as people of faith, is *Tikkun Olam*, the tending, the repairing when necessary of this world that we sail amidst, till every hill resounds with song.

Third, **our ark is on a long journey**. No three-hour tour for the Minnow, this. In geological terms, what we're doing to the planet's climate is incredibly rapid -- but in human terms, it's even slower than that glacier I saw. And frankly, our society is just not great about planning ahead -- just look at a toy store on December 23rd. Or look in the mirror when it comes to last-minute holiday shopping. The consequences of global warming, however, are quite long term. Say, for example, we wait, doing nothing until the evidence for global warming is in our faces -- till say, 1/3 of Bangladesh and 1/4 of Florida are under water, till real estate goes up even more as Philly becomes an oceanfront town, and Los Angeles is shut down with drought and forest fires. It would take more than a quarter century after that point before even a united, intense global effort could begin to get the climate back to normal.

Modernity may think in soundbites, but that isn't the timescale of our traditions. God's promises, and our responsibility to uphold our part of the deal, come in only two time frames -- either L'dor va-dor -- from generation to generation. Or L'olam va-ed -- forever and even further. We are called to live up to the Deuteronomic edict: (30:19) "choose life, that you and your descendants might live."

But what if this is all hyperbole, hot air? What if, despite the consensus of 2000 of the leading scientists around the world, in constantly replicated models and studies, this is just Environmentalist Little shouting that that sky is warming, the sky is warming? Our fourth principle is that **we need to check out the insurance coverage of our ark**. If we burn up this planet, no one will need homeowner's insurance, for none of us would have a place to live. Listen to the most likely consequences of global warming, some of which may already be beginning: severe flooding, increased frequency and severity of both droughts and major storms, increased transmission of tropical diseases, massive loss of species, large-scale economic dislocations, starvation and heat waves. And as we saw again this summer, the people dying when the thermometer is popping are the poor, the elderly, and children -- for God's vulnerable children will suffer first and foremost from climate change. Doesn't a little insurance sound good? Perhaps that's why most major insurance companies around the world are lobbying heavily for immediate and dramatic action to stop global warming. Science is never completely certain -- but when enough evidence is found to create reasonable doubt and indicate that society's present course could threaten the lives or health of present or future generations, we need an adequate margin of safety.

Jewish tradition can help us figure out the dimensions of that margin. In our opening liturgy, we read a peculiar passage in Deuteronomy about putting a parapet around your roof to avoid bloodguilt. Did you ever wonder what that was about? Well, take a trip sometime to Israel. Because Jerusalem gets substantially less rainfall than Philadelphia does, roofs don't need to be peaked. And, in a Middle Eastern climate, there are distinct advantages to having a flat roof -- you can dry clothes there, grow a garden, and it's often the coolest place around on a hot day. It's also a great place to catch a few rays -- which is how David caught sight of Bathsheva. So our text isn't talking about some miniscule, one-in-a-million risk. But it could have said -- "Whosoever is foolish enough to falleth off a roof gets what he or she deserveth." No, God and our traditions value life too much -- and a fall is much easier to prevent than to treat. So people were commanded to build parapets, and, for many years, a basic part of rabbinic training was to be able to inspect such parapets for structural soundness. Now it's time to put back into basic religious curricula the inspection of the structural soundness of our unsustainable economy.

But what if the solution is worse than the problem? That seems to be one of the major points of ongoing propaganda against the Kyoto accord. This brings us to our fifth principle -- we need to be careful about **how we manage our ark and whom we're managing it for**. Being a steward, managing this ark that is our home, is in Latin, *eco nomos* -- the root of the word "economy." Just as "ecology" is literally the study of our home -- our planetary home. When as a Jew I think about the economy, I need to go beyond the saying, "it's the economy, stupid." I need to ask, "Whom is the economy for?" As Chronicles (I 29:11-12) reminds us: "L'cha, Adonai, ha-g'dula v'ha-g'vurah, for the greatness and the power and the glory, and success, and majesty, are Yours, O God. Both riches and honor come of You." My friends, idolatry is far from dead. We've just grown too self-involved to build calves from it, so we worship gold directly instead.

Yes, preventing global warming, with its attendant health and safety risks, will not come free of charge, and very careful decisions need to be made in terms of priorities of spending and their effect upon the health of the economy as a whole. It doesn't make sense, after all, to make the roof collapse on our ark even as we are trying to repair its steering mechanism. But let's get clear exactly what we mean by a healthy economy. If I were to try to cross the Turnpike and some 18 wheeler hit me, the GDP, the gross domestic product, would go up. Ambulances would get paid, lawyers would get paid, doctors would get paid, more lawyers would get paid, car and health insurers would get paid, and some more lawyers would get paid. Is that real economic growth? We need to focus on genuine domestic progress, not gross domestic product -- and short-term profits that bring long term environmental disasters are not progress. The false gods of gold and economics are not the ultimate moral standard – God is.

Furthermore, as people of faith and as citizens of the world, we need to proclaim our sixth principle -- that **no one should be a stranger in our ark**. All, especially the most vulnerable, the least powerful, should be able to find shelter here. This gets to the other point of anti-Kyoto accord propaganda -- that insofar as there may be a problem, it's "their" fault and "they" need to fix it. How should we respond to such claims? Fear, even hatred, of the stranger is nothing new. One of the most common of all Mitzvot, commandments, in the Torah is the admonition to care for and protect the stranger. On the up side, our ancestors clearly thought this was important. On the down side, all that repetition means that they had such trouble obeying this commandment that they had to be reminded repeatedly. As we do today. For, with about 5% of the world's population, we cause over 20% of the greenhouse gases in the world. And when we consider how much we've produced since the industrial age began, the imbalance gets only worse. Furthermore, because we are a nation of great resources, we will be able, perhaps more so than any other nation, to weather the problems that global warming will cause. We have the capacity to move centers of population, to treat diseases, to irrigate crops, to recover from hurricanes and tornadoes. But Bangladesh, for example, will not only be subject to much more flooding, but does not have the resources to protect its population from floods and famines, diseases and drought. Once again, God's most vulnerable children will suffer first and foremost. So why are we blaming "them"?

And, to add to the immorality of blaming others, much of the greenhouse gases we produce are simply the byproduct of our wasteful, inefficient behavior. In fact, we have gone down in some areas of energy efficiency in the past decade, while China, so often criticized in this propaganda, has tripled its energy efficiency during that same decade. Nor is this solely the fault of big, nasty corporations. No, it's our collective decisions, such as to buy big fuel-inefficient utility vehicles of questionable utility and then to drive them more and more miles – alone – that fuels our rapacious consumption of fuel.

So how do we fairly address this global problem -- one that, yes, we make more than our fair share of, but that everyone around the world has some part in causing. Here again Jewish tradition has some interesting insights. The rabbis use a metaphor much like our ark to decide such issues. They examine the responsibility of community members to each other through the lens of an enclosed alleyway, where neighbors rub shoulders with each other. Here, they establish several key insights. First, that since all effect all, each is responsible to each. Thus, in climate terms, we need to work on this together – and we are all responsible to all of our planetary brothers and sisters. Next, newcomers to the neighborhood can't face more restrictive rules than old-timers do – or in modern

terms, developed countries can't put additional stumbling blocks in front of developing ones. Third, when some neighbors are unduly affected by regulations designed for the good of all, those regulations are not waived – but the entire neighborhood works together to ameliorate their effect. So we have a responsibility to stand in solidarity with coal miners and others who will bear the brunt of our transition to a more sustainable economy. Finally, they look at the case of building a wall around a city to protect it from marauders. The sages note that those closest to the wall gain the most benefits – the island nations and Bangaldeshes of today. So are they taxed the most to pay for the wall? No – because they're probably living near the wall in the first place because of limited resources! So while the whole city is taxed, those with the greatest ability to pay, pay the most. Christian scriptures echo this in Luke's famous reminder that from those to whom much has been given, much will be expected. We here in the U.S. have a moral obligation to share our blessings, to help the world develop needed solutions to a sustainable future and to share those solutions. For the sake of the good of the whole ark.

Are we up to the task? Yes I believe that we are. My seventh principle brings us on an arc back to our ark -- **we truly are at home here in God's global ark.** We are part of the order of creation, part of the balance of nature, part of nature itself. The Torah has no word for nature, because it sees humans as a seamless part of creation. Which means that as we work to preserve our world, we make our own lives better, sweeter. For to address global warming, we'll need to make our neighborhoods safer, more livable. Need to reduce the disparity between the poorest and richest. Need to think ahead, to care about our children and our children's children. Need to walk in God's ways with a humble awareness of how deeply we have been blessed.

How will we do this? Many people of faith already are. To help us understand what we can do, must do, I want to close by sharing what others in the faith community have begun, and seven steps we can take to follow them. **First, we need to truly live this message, this new ark covenant, by being true to ourselves as people of faith,** recognizing that we have something unique and important to say when we show that climate change is a faith issue, that God calls on us to protect God's children and God's creation. **Second, we need to educate our congregations,** both about the causes and potential effects of climate change, and why this is an issue of faith and justice. **Third,** despite our tendency to focus on it as folks of faith, **talk is not enough. We need to change the energy habits of our congregations,** to take care of the log in our own eyes, not just spout about the dust mote in our neighbor's. **Fourth,** don't hide our compact fluorescent lights under a bushel – **take leadership in making sure your congregants are changing their energy habits as well.** **Fifth, take it to the streets.** These savings should go on in the rest of our communities, and people and institutions of faith can and should lead the way. For example, Habitat for Humanity is now part of the Evangelical Environmental Network – so make sure the Habitat homes in your town use every energy-saving device possible, thus both empowering the poor and reducing pollution. But there are limits to such independent actions, unless we change the system we act within. And so, **sixth, we must also take our message to town councils, to statehouses, to Capitol Hill, to speak truth to power.** Your efforts to do here in Pennsylvania will be joined with similar campaigns in Ohio, West Virginia, Michigan, and Iowa before the end of this year, with more to come in the future. Always remember, you are not alone. Which leads, **Finally, to our seventh step: hope.** This is perhaps the most precious gift we in the faith community can give to the world. For I don't believe in miracles, I see them, each and every day. Pharaoh is no more, but we are still singing about the parting of the sea. In large part through faith, apartheid has been defeated, and we sit

together in a room where segregation would once have kept us apart. Through faith, through prayer and study and action, we can cross this sea as well.

No, it will not be easy – it never is. As we try to stay true to our message and strive to live it and help others do so as well, we will face temptations to ingratitude, selfishness, shortsightedness, denial, greed, callousness, hubris. We need to make tough moral choices. But we have the God-given ability to make such choices, and we live in a world, a glorious global ark, which, if only we take the time to see it, is so imbued with the divine presence that there is a chorus of creation urging us to make the right choice. . Let us choose life, that we and our descendants might live.

Ecology is Religious

The Rev. Sally G. Bingham
Earth Sunday, April 27, 2003
Grace Cathedral, San Francisco

In the name of God in whom we believe, but cannot see.

Ecology is religious. There, I have said it!! Everyone sit back, it's Earth Sunday. Ecological issues are religious issues and environmental issues are spiritual issues. Life is religious and one's spiritual life is dependent upon a relationship with the Creator and the Creation. Without them we have no life. All life is dependent upon the Creator in whom we live and move and have our being. Without one we will not have the other: Without a healthy ecological system we cannot live healthy lives.

In case any of you think that environmental issues don't belong in church. Think Again!! If you are here today because you have a deep faith in God and consider yourself a Christian, believe this. You are an environmentalist. You may not like that word because it carries baggage with it but we can repack the baggage to mean "a person who cares for others and their neighbor". If you don't want to be called an environmentalist because it sounds liberal, democratic and political then call it something else: call it stewardship of Creation, call it concern for the legacy we leave for future generations, call it being "mindful of your behavior". Call it "loving others as I have loved you". Remind yourselves that "in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and not one thing came into being that didn't come through the word". Jesus was there "in the beginning". All living things will be reconciled to God through Jesus, not just you, me and other humans. All things, all life. Everything that God created and called "good". As a Christian, you and I are called to be care takers of God's Creation. Care for Creation is central to Christology. It belongs right along side love, justice and peace. It is not ours to exploit and to use UP. It is for us to preserve, nurture and keep healthy for the next generations.

If you hadn't realized that your faith calls you to protect and love Creation, but are willing to at least entertain the idea, hold the thought and here is something else to think about. The environmental community is not doing a very good job protecting Creation. After thirty years.....

"The human race has only one, or perhaps two generations to rescue itself," according to the 2003 State of the World report by the Washington-based Worldwatch Institute.

Overuse of resources, pollution and destruction of natural areas continue to threaten life on the planet. Conditions continue to deteriorate rapidly, the report says. Although there are some hopeful signs in that technical solutions to the problems have been found and - where there is political will - adopted, in most cases nothing is being done. The state of the world's

natural life support system is perhaps the most worrying indicator for the future, says the report. About 30% of the world's surviving forests are seriously fragmented or degraded, and they are being cut down at the rate of 50,000sq miles a year. Wetlands have been reduced by 50% over the last century. The 20th annual State of the World report concludes with, "The longer that no remedial action is taken, the greater the degree of misery and biological impoverishment that humankind must be prepared to accept,"

So, in the future, from today on.... it is going to be up to us, you and me and other communities of faith around this country to take a leadership role in the protection of our land, air and water and subsequently our health. If people of faith don't take on this role, how can we expect others to? It is our responsibility. Furthermore, I must remind you that our baptismal vows denounce forces of evil that destroy Creation. Our baptismal vows.

We may not think that we matter when the problems are not on our doorstep, but we do matter. Every one of us and every one of our behaviors matter. Our choices matter. The clothes we wear, the food we eat, the coffee we drink the electricity we use and the cars we drive. These behaviors all affect someone else and many cases, these behaviors affect others adversely. Might we begin to live our lives in a way that shows our love for God? If we recognize God as the source and sustainer of everything, let's live that way.

God loves us and God loves the Creation, which was created to sustain us. Our role is to be in relationship with God in such a way that God, our Creator might know our love. We live for God, do we not! Listen to the lesson from the first letter of John. "If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

This relationship with God must strive to be a harmonious one. If we walk in the light with one another and with all living things we carry forth our faith. We must love the whooping crane and the forest for their own sake, not just for what they can do for us or what USE they are. Use, yes, but exploit and plunder, no! Sustainable use, conservation and sharing rather than greed and hoarding

We are destroying rainforests before we even know the value of what is there. Medicines and cures are being rapidly extinguished. And as my young friend in Japan asked me at a conference. "Why do you adults destroy things that you don't know how to bring back? She said that she was raised not to take things apart if she didn't know how to put them back together.

Each of us has a working theology. Each of us has a place where we center (ourselves) on God; A place where God works through us. We live into that center. Some of our working theologies are in lesser-developed stages than others, but if we live lives for God we do things that are pleasing to God. We love each other and we can, and mostly do, demonstrate

that love in many different ways. Some work with the homeless, some with the elderly and sick, some with children, some in prisons and some of us are just nice people who are kind to strangers, ushers here at the Cathedral, some feed the hungry. My working theology is to live and lead a life that demonstrates love of Creation. In this way, I show my love for God; I drive a small car, have compost in my back yard, and walk when I can, reduce purchases of things I don't really need, and conserve both energy and water. What is your working theology? Where in your daily life do you show God your love?

If you haven't found your niche, why not try showing God your love through living a sustainable live style. Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give." Giving and loving God are what makes us Christians. What good is it to be Christian if we don't in some way lead lives that show we are Christian? Leading by example is what Jesus called us to do. (Jn. 13:35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.")

People will you know us by the example we set.

Some of you may doubt the seriousness of environmental problems: the global warming, the spread of disease, toxins in the water and particulates in the air, the high and rising rates of cancer and asthma. There will always be doubting Thomases, but please don't be one. You can be one, but not about this issue. Don't wait until the wounds are at your door. You don't need to touch and feel what the Scientist know. Don't be afraid to believe them. The problems are real: more study and delay is only allowing things to get things worse. According to the National Academy of Science, over 90% of the world's accredited scientists agree that human activities are destroying creation. They don't call it Creation, for them it is the planet, the living organism that sustains all life.

For religious people the living organism that gives us life is the Creation that God called "good" and gave us dominion over. However, it is a very dangerous notion for us to think that meant we are the center of the universe. God created this world, and put us here to care for it, but we seem to be busy decreating. We have decreated almost everything that God gave us to care for.

There is almost no place in America that we might call pristine. When we go hiking in the mountains now or into a park to sit under a tree, you see coke cans or plastic bags. Trash covers our beaches, lies in the bottom of rivers and streams and once you see that bottle or can, the nature of nature is changed. At least for me. I go into the wild for peace, for communion with the Divine, for a reminder of my relationship with God and for quiet and to be alone. I can't find that anymore. There are snowmobiles racing through our national parks, airplanes and helicopters flying over, noise from cars and worst of all, trash.

All I need when I am out in nature to quickly ruin the communion is one plastic six pack holder on the trail or in the bottom of an otherwise clear stream. Humans are everywhere

and seemingly determined to leave footprints.

Nature isn't the same as it used to be. Humans are creating and decreating. There is hardly a natural anything left. We humans have our influence everywhere and the most startling of all is the climate. We have influenced the climate. Fifty years ago no one would have thought that possible. Image, (pause) the insurance company can no longer claim the severe storms and falling trees are acts of God. You can tell them that there are no more acts of God. The storm damage is the result of human behavior. The increase in carbon dioxide that we have put into the atmosphere has upset the balance that God put into place and now the storms are far more severe and more frequent than ever before. We are influencing every aspect of what was once called the force of nature.

What this is leading up to is a question, if we destroy nature, what are we doing to our relationship with God? What does it mean, when God is no longer in charge, but we are? Genetically engineering plants and cloning animals, changing the climate, killing vast numbers of species that were sacred with their own intrinsic right to life? Bill McKibbin, a writer and naturalist, asks the question: "Have we become God's equal in terms of what happens in the natural world or is there an natural world anymore?"

I struggle with these issues and I have no answers only questions, but it scares me because I am a great fan of the theologian Paul Tillich who said the answers are in the questions.

What are we to do? Well, for starters, don't doubt the seriousness of the ecological issues and the condition of the planet. Believe the scientists. Then lets start to live lives that demonstrate love for one another and love for God. We can do that by shifting what's in our own self-interest. If, instead of the bigger is better, more is better attitude, we can open our hearts to recognize the truth which is that more and bigger are not always better, but rather destructive and harmful even to the owner. If we are going to look after ourselves which most people seek to do, understand that it is in our own interest to become conservationist.

It is most probably love that will transform us. If we can learn to love the natural world, we will protect it and if we love one another we will want future generations to share the bounty that we have had during our time here..

I will interrupt myself for a moment to describe thirty minutes of my Friday afternoon. I left my office about six and went down to Crissy Field. It had just stopped raining, but the sky to the north was still stormy, to the east the sun was out. The normally calm beach was being hit with medium size waves and the sound was wonderful. A large blue heron was standing like a statue in the lagoon. I walked along and took in all the amazing beauty around San Francisco. We are so blessed to live here. Our Presidio still has foxes and at least one coyote. I felt guilty taking in all the natural beauty that so few people get to see much less live in the midst of. We can ski, four hours away, surf, swim, bike on trails, hike within minutes of our homes and all in such splendor. As I thought about what I would say

to you today, it occurred to me that I should have rented a couple of buses and taken you all to a beautiful natural place and just asked you to love it and appreciate it. We don't harm what we love. If our hearts can be transformed to love what God has given us, we will become caretakers of the earth. Become environmentalist. We will want to protect our air, land and water and we will become informed as to how to do that.

So lets bring our religious lives, our faith, and the natural world together into a working theology. Make the connection between ecology and faith and become a steward of creation, a good neighbor, a person who cares about the legacy we leave for the next generations, and, without shame, become an environmentalist. Amen

GLOBAL WARMING

By Metwalli B. Amer, Ph.D

Professor Emeritus at California State University, Sacramento

Founder and Executive Director of Sacramento Area League of Associated Muslims

Global warming is known to be the trapping of gases in the earth's atmosphere. When the gases are trapped, the earth's overall temperature may increase; this is why global warming is also known as the “greenhouse gas effect.”

Some greenhouse gases occur naturally in the atmosphere, while others result from human activities. Naturally occurring greenhouse gases include water vapor, carbon dioxide, and ozone, among other elements. Certain human activities, however, add to the levels of most of these naturally occurring gases, leading to increase in temperatures. The increasing temperatures may be followed by a large variety of other problems for mankind, like El Nino.

Almost one third of the Qur'an speaks about the Creation, as signs of God. Our human race is among the creation of God. He made us His deputies to manage the earth we live in according to His manual, not according to our selfish and greedy desires. Thus, God's creation including the planet earth is sacred. If we follow the intention of our creation, we must also be sacred in dealing with the planet earth. But we desired not to be. And here where our problems with God and His creation have started.

The Qur'an says:

“God has made subservient to you all that is in the heavens and the earth, coming from Him; therein are signs for those who reflect.” (45:12)

The Qur'an often designates God as the one who does what is beautiful in His creation. If God does what is beautiful through creating human beings, human beings have the obligation to do what is beautiful in their relationships with God and other creatures. As God says in the Qur'an:

“Could the reward of goodness be anything but goodness? (55:60)

In another verse, God says:

“Do what is beautiful, as God has done what is beautiful to you.” (28:77)

One example in the beauty of God's creation is the sun and its light that shines and its warm that heats. Once the sun rises, it replaces all man-made light we created during the night. Can any human being create something similar to the light of the sun?

As God challenges us in several places in the Qur'an:

“This is God’s creation; now show Me what those you call upon other than Him have created! Surely the transgressors are in manifest error.” (31:11).

What would happen to earth and the moon if the sun ceases to function? This is the type of reflection that Allah expects us to be occupied with in order to appreciate His creation. As He says in the Qur'an:

“And to God belongs the Control of the heavens and the earth and God has power over all things. Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the disparity of the night and day, there are Signs for those who possess minds. Those who praise God standing, sitting or lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, “Our Lord, You have not created this in vain, glory be to You! So save us from the punishment of Fire.” (3:189-191)

Knowing our weakness, God warned mankind in several verses in the Qur'an:

“... do not seek corruption on earth; surely, God does not love those who corrupt (earth).” (28:77)

In the Chapter of the Qur'an, called the Merciful, God says:

“The sun and the moon follow precise courses... And the sky God raised it high, and He has established the due Balance.” (55:5, 7)

The sun and the moon move in their orbit in perfect succession, according to precise calculation that is never delayed nor disturbed. Examples from the Qur'an can shed light on this perfection and precision in this due balance and in this creation.

“It is not for the sun to catch up the moon, nor does the night outshine the day. Each one is traveling in an orbit with its own motion.” (36:40)

“He causes the dawn to break and made the night for rest, and the sun and the moon for calculating. Such is the measuring of the Almighty, the All-Knowing.” (6:96)

After God cited the importance of this due balance in His creation, he ordered us not to disturb this delicate balance:

“Do not ever tamper with this balance.” (55:8)

Have we observed this due balance or God-given equilibrium that God has asked us to

maintain in His last memo to mankind?

Today there is a great deal of talk about environmental equilibrium at the very moment when this God-given equilibrium is being destroyed by modern man in his revolt against God and against his own inner nature.

I remember that I read some place that the natural average age of the human being is 120 years. We shortened our lives by what we eat, by what we drink, the style of life we chose to live, and by what we did to God's creation around us. Our human minds are establishing their own standards, instead of following the divine guidance. Arrogance has led us to believe that we are gods, not that we are under God. No wonder we are messed up, and we missed the nature around us! We failed miserably in our delegated duty to handle our responsibilities toward this earth. We seek rights, but we shy away from responsibility. We deserve what we face.

That is why God declares:

“Corruption has overtaken in land and sea, for what the hands of mankind have done, that He may let them taste some of what they have done, hoping they may return to the way of God. Say: ‘Travel through the land and see what was the end of those who came before you; most of them were ungrateful’.” (30:41-42)

According to one of the early interpreters of the Qur'an, Ibn Kathir, he says that human beings are facing a lot of shortfalls because of their disobedience of God and because of ruining the natural resources God has created. Whoever disobeys Allah in the earth has corrupted it. Why? Because the good condition of the earth depends on obedience to Allah in His commands to preserve all aspects of life, spiritually, economically, socially, politically, and the nature; this is because Islam is a way of life. And if they failed to obey God, then He tries them with the loss of wealth, souls, and crops through various calamities. This includes natural disasters and imbalance in the atmosphere and environments that affect their health and their lives. The reason for this trial is a test and a punishment for what they have done, hoping they come back to their senses from their disobedience. What happened to previous nations who were guided through previous messengers must be a vivid reminder of what is happening to mankind nowadays globally.

“And that He destroyed the former Aad; and Thamood, and He did not spare them; and the people of Noah before, surely they were most unjust and rude: and the city of the people of Lot He destroyed; So He covered them with that which covered. Which of your Lord's bounties will you then dispute? This is a Warner, of the warners of old. The Judgment Day is approaching. None but God can avert it. Do you then wonder at this talk: And you laugh, instead of weeping, and you indulge in vanities!....” (54:50-56)

My Fellow inhabitant of the planet earth, what should we do?

Whatever knowledge we obtain, we must put it to good use, benefiting humanity in ways that would not harm the environment.

We must give the divine guidance the significant role in solving environmental problems. We must resort to religious ethics, not secular ethics, to solve the problems of global warming. Whatever God made sacred, must be treated as sacred in dealing with it. As God ordered us:

“Do not spread corruption in the earth, after it has been set right....” (7:56)

Our focus as Muslims and members of the human race must be for caring for each other and for the earth that contains us. By destroying it, we are destroying ourselves. There is no escape! Time has come to stop this madness of claiming superiority over each other in matter of faith and to start working with each other to preserve our sense of brotherhood and sisterhood in order to survive. Time has also come to stop this madness of feeling superior over nature and start protecting the only planet earth we have to share with other species who happen to rely on us for their existence.

Protection of the natural environment is “an Islamic obligation.” “All activities causing irreversible damage to the environment are forbidden in Islam. It is heartening to see grassroots Muslims are actively involved in maintaining environment in livable condition.

The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, founded in the mid-1980 has been active in this environmental field. The Foundation states that “Allah entrusted man with the guardianship of the Earth. We have to fulfill that ancient trust now, before it becomes too late.” The Foundation has set up an extensive training program in environmental teachings based on the Qur’an. It promotes self-sufficiency in farming through organic agriculture and perm culture, and it serves as a demonstration center for solar technology, water wheels, waste recycling and wind power. The foundation distributes a teaching pack entitled Qur’an Creation and Conservation, and it is setting up the Muslim Alliance for Conservation as an international grassroots organization.

In his new book, “The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity”, published in 2002, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University, touched on the subject of Islam and environment. He states that environmental crisis is primarily the consequence of an inner malaise that gives human beings unlimited power over nature. This malaise has resulted in the reduction of nature to only a resource for economic production. Islam environmental matters are treated in the sources and applications of Islamic Law, whereas man-made environmental laws seem to be trying to “catch up” with the problems caused by man misuse. The traditional Islamic view is totally opposed to modern relation between human beings and nature. This relation has caused

unprecedented harm to the natural environment, has led to the loss of many species, and now threatens the very future of human life on earth.

On the basis of the Qur'an and Hadith, the Shari'ah, Dr. Nasr says, has extensive teachings, both legal and moral, concerning the natural environment: the way that animals should be treated kindly, trees preserved and not cut unless absolutely necessary, vegetation guarded even in war, running water protected, and many other relevant issues. The Prophet himself was always very kind to animals. As for trees, he emphasized the significance of creating what is today called green space; He said,

“It is a blessed act to plant a tree even if it be a day before the end of the world.”

Dr. Nasr Continues, the Shari'ah promulgates certain general principles concerning the environment, such as that of balance (mizān) between all parts of God's creation, the prohibition of waste, and respect for all life forms, and specific injunctions, such as the creation of protected areas for wildlife.....

A whole new branch of the Shari'ah is now being developed on the basis of the traditional sources of the Divine Law to address the crucial problems posed by the environmental crisis. This branch of the Shari'ah is one of the most challenging and dynamic aspects of it in the present day.” (The heart of Islam, pp 142-144, 2002)

Finally, we must be concerned with the well-being of our brothers and sisters in the human race. Our thinking and priority will completely change if we believe in the Golden rule that many religions share with Islam: “Love to your brothers and sisters in humanity what you love to yourself.” If we believed and implemented this rule, there will be no room for greed or envy.

Islamic teachings promote the protection of the earth's ecosystems, safeguard public health and ensure sufficient and sustainable energy for all. Maintaining your body and soul in the condition that God intended them to be is an obligation on each Muslim.

The 45,000 Muslims in the Sacramento Valley join people of all faiths in requesting our public officials in cutting greenhouse gas emissions by investing in energy efficiency and by buying renewable energy generated from God's created gifts, the wind, the sun and natural resources.

May God guide us to be true faithful as guardians to God's creation and maintain the planet earth in the way the Creator wanted it to be.