

JUDAIC, CHRISTIAN, AND ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES ON SHARED MORAL PRINCIPLES

Abrahamic Traditions and Environmental Change MENA Project

Using eight common principles identified in prior research on the environmental views of the world religions,¹ colleagues² who participated in the Abrahamic Traditions and Environmental Change Workshop in Rhodes, Greece, 23-26 June 2019³ volunteered to indicate the extent to which their traditions—Judaic, Christian, or Islamic—agree with each principle and to provide a citation to a valued source that supports the principle. The outcome of this compilation provides succinct theological grounding for motivating members of their respective communities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to address ongoing problems of water availability, biological diversity loss, ecosystem degradation, and human-induced climate change. Members of their respective communities are strongly urged to return to the sources of their traditions and to reflect on them for meaningful motivation for their actions, including their efforts to collaborate with one another in addressing shared concerns.

Principle #1 The natural world has value in itself and does not exist solely to serve human needs.

Reflection on Judaic sources yields absolute agreement with this principle. From a biblical perspective, the Genesis 1 story of creation depicts God as valuing each entity created as “good” (Gen 1: 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), a term that implies the intrinsic, inherent value of each type of creature independent of human needs, and God’s valuing the totality of creation as “very good” (Gen 1:31), thereby implying its intrinsic, inherent value. That goodness is a function of its essence and not its utilitarian exchange value according to some human calculus is supported by Rabbinic reflections discouraging thoughts about the superfluousness of any creature (e.g., flies, fleas, mosquitoes, snakes and scorpions) because they are parts of God’s greater scheme of the creation of the world (Talmud Shabbat 77b and parallels). Maimonides encouraged valuing all creatures intrinsically: “all beings should not be believed to exist for the sake of man's existence. Rather all other beings too were intended to exist for their own sakes, not for the sake of something else” (*Guide to the Perplexed* 3:13).

Christian theologians also highlight in commentaries on Genesis 1 that God’s attribution of intrinsic value to each created entity should propel the faithful to also value them in themselves through words and actions. Dwelling on the text’s depiction of God’s declaring each type of creature “good,” John Chrysostom scoffed at anyone who, “bursting with arrogant folly,” would contradict God’s valuation and urged his listeners to show gratitude to God for all creatures—whether beneficial or harmful to humans (*Homilies on Genesis* 10.12). Augustine of Hippo reflected on each creature as good according to their natures given by God (*Nature of the Good* 3) and profusely extolled the goodness of the earth, mountains, fields, air, animals and other creatures (*On the Trinity* 8.3.4), all of which manifest God’s goodness. Aquinas identified gradations of goodness in creatures according to God-given natures

¹Research supporting these principles can be found in Kusumita F. Pedersen’s “Environmental Ethics in Interreligious Perspective” in *Explorations in Global Ethics: Comparative Religious Ethics and Interreligious Dialogue*, eds. Sumner B. Twiss and Bruce Grelle, 253-290 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).

²Jeremy Benstein, The Heschel Sustainability Center, Tel Aviv, Israel, jeremy@heschel.org.ill; Fazlun Khalid, Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Birmingham, United Kingdom, fazlun.khalid@ifees.org.uk; İbrahim Özdemir, Åbo Akademi University Department of Philosophy, Turku, Finland, ib60dmr@gmail.com; Nawal Ammar, Dean, College of Humanities and Sciences, Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ USA, ammar@rowan.edu; and Jame Schaefer, Marquette University Department of Theology, Milwaukee, WI USA, schaeferj@marquette.edu, who compiled and edited their contributions.

³Sponsored by the University of Connecticut’s Abrahamic Programs for Academic Collaboration in the MENA Region, Al Akhawayn University, and The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, the workshop was held in Rhodes, Greece, 23-26 June 2019;

https://abrahamicprograms.uconn.edu/events/abrahamic_traditions_and_environmental_change/#.

whereby all inanimate and animate creatures constitute an instrumental “order of conservation” in which plants use soil, animals use plants, and human use animals to internally maintain the functioning of the universe (e.g., *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.22). Within this order, all creatures are essential, all are good according to their natures, and all are vital for the functioning of the universe (*Summa theologiae* 1.65.2) that God sustains in existence. Pope Francis reflects this theological tradition in *Laudato si’, On Care of Our Common Home* (2015) in which he underscores the intrinsic value of all creatures apart from their use for humans (#118), the intrinsic value of ecological systems (#140), and the intrinsic value and dignity of the world (#115). Important for Christians to remember is the traditional understanding of the sacramental quality of the physical, visible world that it mediates God’s presence to us, tells us about God’s character, and, in its entirety, best manifests God’s goodness.

Islam views the natural world as valuable in its relation to God as a totality (*tawhīd al-khalq*) in which all creatures are dependent upon God for their existence. Their purposeful creator provides sustenance for them (*Qur’an* 11:6) in a world governed by the principles of unity, balance and harmony that penetrates every dimension of personal and social life. All creatures are loved by God, reflect God’s will, praise God, and declare God’s glory (*Qur’an* 33:72) according to their natures and together as an interacting entirety. From this Islamic perspective, the world does not exist solely to serve human needs (e.g., *Qur’an* 55:10-12). Humans are creatures among other creatures, dependents among other dependents, who should be able to recognize other creatures—animate and inanimate—as signs of God (e.g., *Qur’an* 41:53, 51:20–21, 10:5–6) that display God’s skill and perfection (*Qur’an* 16:66) and to take care of God’s creation as God’s trustees. Ours is a bestowed trust as God’s dependents, and “the most beloved among them is the one that does good to God’s dependents” (Anas. Mishkat al-Masabih, 3:1392).

Principle #2 There is a significant continuity of existence between human and non-human living beings, even though humans have a distinctive role; this continuity can be felt and experienced.

To a great degree, reflections on Judaic sources agree with this principle. Collectively, humans and other species are *adam* made from *adamah*—the earth. The Torah inculcates in us a sense of our modesty and lowliness of which we should be cognizant because we are made of the same stuff as the ass and mule, the cabbage and pomegranate, and even the lifeless stone (Ibn Kaspi, *Adnei Kesef* on Deuteronomy 22:6).

Christian reflections also agree with this principle from their faith perspective that the world of many living creatures has been made possible by God and would not exist if God had not willed its existence and sustains its existence. All living creatures are related to one another by their creaturehood, dependent on God for their ongoing existence, and able to function in relation to one another to sustain their shared existence. They also are reliant on non-living creations (e.g., soil, air, water, sun) that God made possible for their sustenance. Some Christian writers (e.g., Celtic wanderers, English hermits, and Francis of Assisi) underscored the kinship of all animate creatures based on their living experiences with them. Scientific knowledge about the spewing from the furnaces of stars elements that are essential for organic bodies like ours to form, the emergence of life on Earth from single-celled organisms, and the evolution of species strengthen our Christian sense of the continuity of humans with other living beings. These realizations should prompt awe and gratitude to God for the processes through which life emerged and spur Christians to do what most distinguishes humans among creatures—to make and execute informed decisions about living with one another and other species in ways that are mutually beneficial for Earth’s flourishing.

In the Islamic tradition, a continuity exists among diverse creatures wherein humankind is given the dignified position of “trustee on earth” (*khalifa*) (*Qur’an* 2:30) who must show humility when carrying out the responsibilities required of trustees. “The creation of the heavens and the earth is far greater than creation of humankind” (*Qur’an* 40:57). The humblest of God’s creation is given the weightiest responsibilities—the price we pay for the privilege of intelligence that God has bestowed on us. We are accountable to God on the Day of Judgment for how we exercise our special

responsibilities as trustees. Clearly, we are not owners and masters of the natural environment; we are trustees to whom God has delegated the responsibility of maintaining and utilizing the natural environment in accordance with God's intentions. The *Qur'an* and the prophetic traditions prescribe a criterion for responsible human trusteeship of Earth by refraining from actions that lead to the corruption of the environment: "Do no mischief on the earth after it hath been set in order" (*Qur'an* 7:56). The Prophet Muhammad is the perfect role model for all Muslims when striving to fulfill their responsibilities.

Principle #3 Non-human beings are morally significant to God and/or in the cosmic order; they have their own unique relations to God, and their own places in the cosmic order.

As indicated in Psalm 145, God's "tender mercy is over all His creatures." Jewish traditions support the understanding that creatures who are not human are morally significant to God as God's creations, all have their own unique relation to God who cares for them according to their natures, and all have essential roles to play within God's creation.

Reflections by Christian theologians about God's love for all creatures according to their natures and God's care for non-human living creatures by providing for their needs and capabilities through which to nourish themselves within the orderly universe imply that they are morally significant for God and should be morally significant for the faithful. Also supportive of this principle are exclamations by eminent theologians about the goodness, beauty and integrity of non-human and inanimate creatures—from tiny insects to large mammals, plains to mountain valleys, trees to forests, and streams to wide rivers. For example, when giving homilies on Genesis 1, Basil of Caesarea urged his listeners to pay attention to all the creatures, to never cease admiring them, and to give glory to God for them (*On the Hexameron* 2 and 5).

The traditional Islamic view maintains that all animate creatures constitute communities willed into and sustained in existence by God and conduct themselves in ways that assure their continuity. The great whales that plough the oceans, elephants of the tropical forests and the ants and bees are examples of creatures forming complex, efficient, multi-generational communities. Annual mass migrations like the huge flocks of birds that fly each year from one climate zone to another, the movements of reindeer in the tundra and the wildebeest in the African Savannah are striking examples of animals cooperating among members of their species to survive. All have moral significance for God who cares and loves them. As God's trustees, Muslims have a special responsibility to God for maintaining and utilizing the natural environment in accordance with God's intentions.

Principle #4 The dependence of human life on the natural world can and should be acknowledged in ritual and other expressions of appreciation and gratitude.

Jewish traditions exemplify a deeply embedded range of rituals and other expressions of gratitude to God for the dependence of human life on the natural world. *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land of Israel, is the distinct homeland that is always present and central to traditional Jewish consciousness as demonstrated in liturgies, observances and commandments (mitzvot) that are applicable only in the Land (e.g., tithes on produce and the entire *shemita* year—a year of release and renewal). Judaism also has a universal spiritual language pertaining to the environment that is accessible everywhere as manifested in the Jewish calendar that connects the major Jewish holidays to natural cycles and makes these cycles felt in the life of the Jew. They mark the harvests and the seasons—Passover (*Pesach*) in spring, the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost (*Shavuot*) in early summer, the Festival of Booths (*Sukkot*) in fall, and, the later instituted, the Festival of Lights (Hanukkah) in winter—all of which provide occasions for Jews to express their gratitude to God for the natural world in which they live.

Though the Easter Vigil has been the one annual ritual over the centuries in which Christians recall their dependence on the natural world and express gratitude to God for this gift, the initiation of the Day of Prayer for the Environment in 1989 by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios began a tradition that his successor Patriarch Bartholomew continued from the inception of his

patriarchy in 1991. His many sermons, homilies, prayers and trips with other religious leaders, scientists and reporters to endangered areas were concurrent with statements by popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI on the ecological crisis as a moral responsibility for Christians to address, rituals in various Christian denominations, interfaith prayer services, and participation in the Environmental Sabbath in the late 198s and early 1990s during the first weekend in June. In 2015, Pope Francis joined the Patriarch in renaming September 1 the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation and together called Christians and the faithful of all religions and spiritualities to reflect on their traditions and how they can act to care for Earth, our common home. When thinking about expressing appreciation and gratitude to God, let us recall Psalm 148 in which all creatures are depicted as giving praise to God in their own “voices” and Francis of Assisi’s reworking the psalm with familial language to yield *The Canticle of Creation*. We must now ask ourselves: Will we—human creatures—join the chorus praising God for the world or continue to cause and allow the dissonance that persists as manifested by the ecological-social crisis?

Muslims recite at the beginning of each of the five daily prayers, “I have turned my face to Him who originated (*fatara*) the heavens and the Earth” (*Qur’an* 6: 79). This is followed by the Opening (*Fatiha*) of the first chapter of the *Qur’an* that “ALL PRAISE is due to God alone, the Sustainer of all the worlds, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace” (1:1). This *Fatiha* is recited seventeen times a day in the observation of the five daily prayers. These verses have shaped and formed Muslims’ perception of the universe and humanity in the past and the present. The *Qur’an* portrays young Abraham not only as a man burning for learning, but also as a man of faith, commitment, sincerity, hospitality, and integrity. In his search for meaning, Abraham finds his God as “the Sustainer of all the worlds” who has created us and guides us. God is “the One who gives me to eat and to drink, and when I fall ill, is the One who restores me to health” (*Qur’an* 26:79-80). The whole creation belongs to God who deserves praise and gratitude from the faithful. Clearly, our well-being depends on the well-being of Earth. Followers of Islam believe that the entirety of Earth is a place of prayer—a sacred space where one can contemplate God. Daily activities carried out in this space require exemplary behavior; every act is expected to be like a prayer. Prayer and the natural world are irrevocably connected, and Muslims anticipate that Earth will one day tell how she was treated by humans:

When the earth is shaken with a (violent) shaking,
And the earth reveals what burdens her,
And humans say: What has befallen her?
On that day she shall tell her story....” (*Qur’an* 99:1-4)

Principle #5 Moral norms such as justice, compassion and reciprocity apply (in appropriate ways) both to human and to non-human beings whose well-being are inseparably connected.

Judaic sources prescribe justice, compassion and reciprocity toward humans and non-humans, thereby affirming their inseparable connection: Helping the donkey who is struggling or has fallen under a heavy load (Deuteronomy 22:4) even if the donkey is someone else’s property, including one’s enemy (Exodus 23:5); refraining from yoking a donkey and an ox together (Deuteronomy 22:10) because the weaker will suffer (25:4); and allowing one’s animals to rest on Shabbat (Deuteronomy 5:14) that is similar to a labor law aimed at protecting the conditions of the workers. That animals and humans are part of the same moral community was clear to Jews in antiquity as indicated in Nineveh’s making atonement with the cattle who fast and wear sackcloth (Jonah 3:5-8) and the description of the trial of oxen for goring (*Mishna Sanhedrin* 1:4 on Exodus 21:28-9). Characteristics of righteousness (*tzadikkim*) that Jews were urged to develop included seeking intimate knowledge of the needs and wants of animals (Proverbs 12:10), saving them in their efforts to preserve the world from natural disaster (Tanhuma, Noah 5), learning how to be kind from shepherding sheep, and compassion in treating camels that demonstrated Rebecca’s worthiness as a loyal wife to Isaac (Genesis 24:14-20). Having compassion for creatures was a particularly important characteristic for a Jew: “Whoever has compassion upon his fellow creatures, upon him will God have compassion” (Tosefta Bava Kamma 9:30;

Sifrei Deuteronomy 96).

Compassion, justice, and reciprocity are especially prominent in Christian moral norms for intra-human encounters, but they are less prominent when humans relate to non-human living and inanimate beings. In hagiography about and by Christian desert fathers, Celtic wanderers, and English hermits can be found expressions of compassion for and reciprocity with animals of all types in diverse natural places. These holy men variously protected and fed wild animals in their midst, saved them from others' cruelty, showered affection on them, considered some animals their disciples and followers, described animals' reciprocity to them when aiding, feeding and protecting the holy men that they interpreted as God's ways of providing for them, and depicted animals' lamenting their sicknesses and dying. Some expressed their deep appreciation for natural settings that prompted them to advocate mountains and plains from destruction. The flowering of their compassion, piety and sense of reciprocity is exemplified in writings about the life of Francis of Assisi who was proclaimed the patron saint of animals and ecology in 1979 by Pope John Paul II. When reflecting on Old Testament sources that prohibited cruelty to animals, Aquinas explained that affection and compassion for animals is a characteristic that the faithful should demonstrate and prompt them to be compassionate toward other humans (*Summa theologiae* 1 | 2.102.6 ad 8). Expanding the characteristic of justice to apply directly to non-human living and inanimate creatures remains challenging for Christians to explain theologically today, though their involvement in the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and rules proposed by the World Council of Churches to restrict the use of animals for testing products slated for human consumption have been effective.

For Muslims, being just is integral to being conscious of God in every aspect of one's life: "bearing witness to the truth in all equity; and never let hatred of any-one lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Be just: this is closest to being God-conscious. And remain conscious of God: verily, God is aware of all that you do" (*Qur'an* 5:8). Justice is one of Islam's four core values with loving (*hubb*) (*Qur'an* 85:13–14, humility (*khushu*) (*Qur'an* 25:63, and trustworthiness (*amanah*) (*Qur'an* 33:72). Though humans are required to act justly toward one another, especially the poor and vulnerable, as the Prophet Mohammad consistently taught and demonstrated, do Islamic traditions require the faithful to demonstrate justice toward non-human beings? As a universal law of God, justice should be demonstrated in all aspects of the person's life, and Muslims should never forget that God laid out the earth for many diverse creatures for their use, not solely for human use (*Qur'an* 55:10-12). A close relationship exists between God, as Lord and Sustainer of the world, and animals requiring us to make and make and execute decisions that do not disrupt the orderly balance (*mizan*) of the world. Because humankind was made in a state of goodness with the potential for good actions, we can choose to use our God-bestowed gift to reason from the truth and submit subsequently to God's will in all decisions made (*Qur'an* 7:181, 13:11), including decisions that relate to non-human animals and the sustainability of Earth. Muslims are assured that those who act rightly will be rewarded by God (*Qur'an* 2:62).

Principle #6 There are legitimate and illegitimate uses of nature.

Judaic sources and reflections on them affirm this principle absolutely. Some people quote Psalms 115:16 "The heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth He gave over to humanity" as the basis for unbridled human use of God's creation. However, according to the 12th century Spanish Biblical exegete Abraham ibn Ezra, that interpretation of the psalm is stupid and uninformed: "The ignorant have compared humanity's rule over the earth with God's rule over the heavens. This is not right, for God rules over everything. The meaning of "but the earth He gave over to humanity" is that humanity is God's steward (*pakeed*) over the earth and must do everything according to God's word." Humans are not free to do as they please with God's creation. Ibn Ezra's use of the term *pakeed* is richly suggestive: the root p-k-d has a variety of meanings including command, count, appoint, remember, and deposit. If humans are the *pakeed*, the agent in whose care a pledge has been placed, the earth is the *pikadon*, the deposit itself, and God is the *mafkeed*, the lessor or depositor. God also is the *po'kehd*, the one who commands, inspects, and remembers, both for punishment, negative consequences (*po'kehd avon*,

“visiting the sin upon”), and for positive ones, including grace (as when God “remembered” Sarah and caused her to conceive). The notion of stewardship embodies a sense of responsibility in two directions: “downward” for the earth, the deposit, that thing that is held in trust for the sake of the owner, and “upward” to God (*koneh shamayim va’aretz*), the creator and possessor of the universe.

Legitimate and illegitimate uses of God’s creation pervade Christian sources throughout the centuries. Animals, plants, land, water, and air—the goods of Earth—may be used for the *necessities of life* as the faithful proceed in their temporal lives while hoping for eternal presence before God. Anything in excess of temporal life’s necessities is proscribed; so also are abuse and wastefulness. As Aquinas and others wrote for their times, God willed into existence a universe in which all components function according to their natures and purposes, but only humans rebel by making and executing decisions that disrupt its functioning through illegitimate uses and actions (e.g., *Summa theologiae* 1.49.3 ad 5, 1 | 2.109.3; *Compendium theologiae* 192, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.108.6). In the New Testament and reflections by theologians, Christians are urged to be vigilant for the return of Jesus the Christ, avoid encumbering themselves with possessions that can choke their desire for God, and orient their temporal lives toward everlasting happiness with God (e.g., Luke 12:32-48, Colossians 3:2).

“The servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk gently upon the earth” (*Qur’an* 25:63). How are Muslims urged to walk gently? To share water equitably: “And let them know that the water [of their wells] is to be divided between them, with each share of water equitably apportioned” (*Qur’an* 54:28). To avoid extravagance as urged by the Prophet Muhammad when passing a companion who was performing ablution: “What is this extravagance?” Sa’d said. “Is there extravagance with water in ablution?” The Prophet said, “Yes, even if you were on the banks of a flowing river” (Sunan Ibn Mājah 425), and “Eat and drink, but waste not by excess, for God loves not the wasters” (*Qur’an* 7:31). Not causing corruption and upsetting the balance of nature (*mizan*) God established: “And do not cause corruption in the earth, when it has been in order” (*Qur’an* 26:151-152), and “He erected heaven and established the balance...so that you would not exceed the balance (*Qur’an* 55: 7, 8). Yet our actions have disrupted the balance (*mizan*) of creation. We have managed to change the climate, melt the glaciers at the poles and on mountain-tops, poison rivers, drain lakes, level mountains, corrode the corals in the oceans, poison the soil, denude the forests, and cause the extinction of other species. Human presence on Earth is short-lived in terms of cosmic time and, as latecomers, we have behaved outrageously. This geological epoch is now coming to be known as the Anthropocene—a term used to indicate that the human species has now itself become a force of nature.

Corruption has appeared in both land and sea

Because of what people’s own hands have brought

So that they may taste something of what they have done.

So that hopefully they will turn back (*Qur’an* 30: 41).

Thus, Muslims have an ethical imperative and responsibility to maintain and preserve the balance of ecosystems and the biosphere because God “created all things in proportion and measure” (*Qur’an*: 54:49).

Principle #7 Greed and destructiveness are condemned; restraint and protection are commended.

For Jews, this principle is key and central to the 10th Commandment: “Thou shalt not covet.” Though this commandment reads as an individual precept condemning the coveting of one’s neighbor’s property, what does “coveting” mean? An argument among biblical commentators, both Jewish and Christian, for two thousand years has centered around whether this mandate pertains to inner feelings or outward behavior. Philo, the great Greco-Jewish philosopher of antiquity, generalizes “do not covet” to apply to all forms of covetousness, including greed for money, hunger for honor, sexual lust, hedonism and gluttony. He re-emphasizes the emotional states associated with insatiable desires and the importance of spiritual work, which brings us back to the key question of having enough and knowing that it is. This inner work is a necessary first step towards the ultimate goal of transforming society from its obsession with quantity to striving for quality, from outer acquisition to

inner disposition, and from merely having to truly being. “Who is rich?” one rabbi asked, and answered, “One who is satisfied with one’s portion” (Pirkei Avot, *Ethics of the Fathers*, 4:1) should help all pause to think about inner and outward dimensions of coveting. Maimonides legislated against eating or drinking to excess, wearing ostentatious clothing, or leading an extravagant lifestyle that requires going into debt or living off the largesse of others (*Mishneh Torah, Laws of Opinions* 5). Let us learn from the wisdom of our tradition.

Greed, destructiveness, and wastefulness are among the vices (bad habits) that Christian sources proscribe, while self-restraint and protection prompted by prudence (informed decision-making) are commended as virtues (good habits) to develop in oneself in order to be inclined to act promptly when seeking and using the goods of Earth. We should be using them wisely for the necessities of life while assuring their availability to others for their needs. We should be protecting other species so they can sustain themselves. We should be protecting the land, waters, and air so they can function according to their natures and provide basic needs for living beings. Throughout the centuries, Christians have been beseeched to live virtuously—steadfastly prudent, just, moderate, humbly, and compassionately—when relating to and living within this world of many creatures. We are motivated to live virtuously in this life, Aquinas tells us, for love of our neighbor for whom we wish temporal and eternal happiness and ultimately for love of God whose presence we yearn to enjoy forever (*Summa theologiae* 2 | 2.25.2-3; *De caritate* 4 and 7).

Muslims who heed the rule “waste not by excess, for God loves not the wasters” (*Qur’an* 7:31) will not waste the goods of Earth. Nor will they be greedy—selfish, excessive in wants with an uncontrolled desire for possessions that denies the same goods to others (*Qur’an* 2:205). They will not endanger species, destroy their habitats, degrade ecological systems, and threaten the viability of the biosphere because these actions disrupt the order and balance of the universe that God made possible. Instead, Muslims will honor and embrace their roles as trustees of God’s creation by exercising self-restraint when using God’s creation, using it for human benefit without causing damage to the other inhabitants of Earth who constitute communities of their own (*Qur’an* 6:38), and protecting its order and balance. They will “hasten to do good” (*Qur’an* 2:205). They will take seriously their position as having been appointed by God: “It is God who appointed you as trustees on the Earth” (*Qur’an* 6:165). They recognize that their Creator “offered the trust to the heavens, the earth and the mountains, but they refused to take it on and shrank from it. But humans took it on” (*Qur’an* 33: 72). Muslims realize the enormity of this trust that imposes on us a moral responsibility—the weightiest of all responsibilities and the price humans pay for the gift of intelligence—the exclusive privilege of communicating and changing the natural world at will. Justice (*adl*) is the basis upon which we are required to execute this trust: “weigh with justice and skimp not in the balance. God set the earth down for all beings. With its fruits, its palm trees with clustered sheaths” (*Qur’an* 55:9–11). Muslims will accept, embrace, and demonstrate their sacred duty of trustees with a spirit of modesty and altruism by caring for and managing Earth in ways that conform to God’s intention.

Principle #8 Humans are obliged to be aware of and responsible for living in harmony with the natural world and should follow the specific practices prescribed by their traditions.

Sources of Judaism accord with this principle that we should be aware of and responsible for living in harmony with the natural world. A range of specific practices can demonstrate this responsibility. According to a 15th century commentary on Deuteronomy 22:6-7: “The Torah’s intention is to prevent the possibility of untimely destruction and to encourage Creation to exist as fully as possible... ‘In order that you may fare well and have length of days’ means that it shall be good for humankind when Creation is perpetuated so that we will be able to partake of it again in the future...since if we are destined to live for many years on this earth, we are reliant upon Creation perpetuating itself so that we will always have sufficient resources” (Don Isaac Abravanel, ad loc.). At the core of this teaching is the covenantal model that establishes an everlasting relationship between God, Israel, and the land of Israel. This covenant is a subset of a larger God-human (*adam*)–earth

(*adamah*) relationship described in the Noahic covenant (Genesis 9:8-17) that includes Earth in its entirety and obliges all inhabitants of our planet to be responsible to God for how we act in relation to Earth. When underscored, this covenant can be practiced in several ways: by refraining from using labor-saving devices on Shabbat—a day of joy, rest, restoration of strength, and deflation of our arrogance and by avoiding intervention in the creation, thereby limiting human creativity, reinforcing human creatureliness, and demonstrating humility before God as guests responsible for maintaining God’s creation (Talmud, Sanhedrin 38). The accelerated rate of species extinction, degradation of ecological systems, and threats to the viability of Earth’s biosphere warrant our following this principle in the Middle East, North Africa, and all over the world.

Since 1983, the World Council of Churches has been encouraging Christians to make justice, peace, and the integrity of Creation central to their lives. Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI issued statements in 1990 and 2010 linking our moral responsibility for living in harmony with Earth and one another. Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew have been vigorously urging Christians and others to be aware of their responsibilities for Earth, the home we share with one another, other species, their habitats, and ecological systems. All Christian denominations have been invited to reflect on our moral responsibilities to care about and for Earth on The World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation that is celebrated on September 1 each year. Though this day provides an important reminder for Christians to express our gratitude to God for our common home and to demonstrate our gratitude through words and actions, one day a year is inadequate for addressing the many threats to the Earth community. Plans are underway through the Vatican’s Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development for a multi-faceted commemoration of Pope Francis’s epochal 2015 encyclical throughout 2020 during which parishes, dioceses, educational institutions, and non-government organizations will be asked to take the *Laudato si’* Pledge to pray for and with creation, live more simply, and advocate protection of our common home at all levels of governance. More faith-based actions are needed to mitigate the effects of human-forced climate change and other environmental problems that inevitably have social ramifications—especially for poor and vulnerable people.

According to the *Qur’an*, “Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of humans have wrought, that God may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return [to guidance]” (30:41). Returning to the sources of Islam—the *Qur’an* and the Sunnah—that tell Muslims about God’s creation, our place in the natural order, and the responsibilities we must shoulder as trustees. We need to regain that consciousness we once had of the oneness of God’s creation, that we are deeply and irrevocably interwoven into its fabric, that we are causing grievous bodily harm to God’s creation, and that harm is hurting us. Now is the time for a reappraisal of our core sources through which to gain a fresh and meaningful understanding of what they are telling and guiding us about living responsibly in the world as true trustees. The *Qur’an* describes the Prophet Muhammad as having been “endowed with a noble character” (*Qur’an* 68:4) and reminds us that “in the Messenger of God you have a beautiful pattern of conduct” (*Qur’an* 33:21). He is a role model for living in harmony with the natural world. His attitudes toward nature and animals are concrete examples for us as manifestations of the Qur’anic spirit. He attached great importance in his own practice and sayings (*hadiths*) not only to public worship, civil law, and social etiquette, but also to planting trees, preserving forests, conserving the environment, and compassionately treating animals. He is the exemplar for us to recognize and emulate through our actions today.

Sources by Contributors to the Above Entries

Ammar, N. “An Islamic Response to the Manifest Ecological Crisis: Issues of Justice.” In *Visions of a New Earth: New Vision on Population, Consumption and Ecology*, ed. H. Coward and D. Maguire, 230-266. New York: SUNY Press, 2000.

Benstein, J. *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*. Woodstock VT: Jewish Lights, 2006.

Khalid, F. *Qur'an, Creation and Conservation*. Birmingham UK: Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, 1999.

Khalid, F. *Signs on the Earth: Islam, Modernity and the Climate Crisis*. Markfield UK: Kube Publishing, 2019.

Özdemir, İ. *The Ethical Dimension of Human Attitude Towards Nature*, 2nd edition. Istanbul: İnsan Publications, 2008.

Özdemir, İ. "Towards an understanding of environmental ethic from a Qur'anic perspective." In *Islam and Ecology – A Bestowed Trust*, ed. R. Foltz, F. M. Denny, A. Baharuddin. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.

Schaefer, J. "Motivated for Action and Collaboration: The Abrahamic Religions and Climate Change." *Geosciences* 6.2 (2016): 1-19.

Schaefer, J. *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics: Reconstructing Patristic and Medieval Concepts*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009.

JS: 8.20.2019