



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Water Sustainability: Its Importance and Methods of Preservation A Deductive Study from the Qur'ān and Sunnah

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## ABSTRACT

This article delves into the Islamic principles of water sustainability and preservation. Drawing on the Qur'ānic divine guidelines and prophetic teachings of the Sunnah, it explores legitimate methods to harness and preserve water resources and highlights the importance of responsible water usage. The article's key finding is that Islam strongly emphasizes water sustainability. It reveals that Islamic law prohibits water wastage, even in acts of worship, demonstrating a commitment to responsible water usage.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of humanity's enduring concerns is safeguarding the essentials and factors of life. Water sustainability is a top priority, and for good reason.

Sustainability refers to the endurance and conservation of something. Water, being essential for both drinking and food production, is the foundation upon which humans build themselves and their civilizations. For instance, look at [•Alsallom, A. F. (2024). Food sustainability in times of crises a deductive study from the Holy Qur'ān, chapter 12 (Yūsuf/Joseph). Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology, 8(6), 3628–3635. <https://doi.org/10.55214/25768484.v8i6.2784>]

## 2. The Need for Water

Allāh has made water indispensable for the survival of all living beings, and He gave man a special place among all creatures: "And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference." (Chapter 17: 70) Given that, focus will be placed on man's need for water and its importance in building civilizations.

### 2.1. Water Is Essential for Human Life

Allāh has established water as the fundamental element for all living beings: "And We made from water every living thing" (Chapter 21: 30). By sending down rain, Allāh gives life to everything on Earth. This is why Allāh has blessed man with rainfall; He says in His Holy Book, "and We send down from the sky pure water." (Chapter 25: 48)

Because water is a fundamental need for humans, the inhabitants of Hell will first beg for water on the Day of Judgment. The Qur'ān paints a vivid picture of this terrible punishment where Allāh deprives the people of Hell of water: "And the companions of the Fire will call to the companions of Paradise, 'Pour upon us some water or from whatever Allāh has provided you.' They will say, 'Indeed, Allāh has forbidden them both to the disbelievers.'" (Chapter 7: 50)

Given humanity's reliance on water, Prophet Muḥammad, when asked what the best charity is, said "Providing water to those in need." (Al-Musnad: 22459).

Allāh has uniquely blessed Earth with water, transforming it to a place suitable for life. This is why scientists look for water on other planets as a sign of potential life. Many verses in the Holy Qur'ān assert this fact. Qur'ān, furthermore, describes rain as a mercy and a source of sustenance to people: "And it is He who sends the winds as good tidings before His mercy [i.e., rainfall] until, when they have carried heavy rainclouds, We drive them to a dead land and We send down rain therein and bring forth thereby [some] of all the fruits. Thus, will We bring forth the dead; perhaps you may be reminded." (Chapter 7: 57) The Qur'ān.

Additionally, Qur'ān stresses the importance of water as a blessing to all living beings: "And have you seen the water that you drink? \* Is it you who brought it down from the clouds, or is it We who bring it down? \* If We willed, We could make it bitter, so why are you not grateful?" (Chapter 56: 68-70)

## 2.2. Civilization Needs Water

Allāh created Adam and his offspring and appointed them as His successors on Earth, informing the angels of this divine purpose: "And [mention, O Muḥammad], when your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority.'" (Chapter 2: 30); "And it is He who has made you successors upon the earth." (Chapter 6: 165) Allāh, further, commanded humans to inhabit Earth: "He has produced you from the earth and settled you in it." (Chapter 11: 61)

Therefore, Muslims live and cultivate the universe, fulfilling, thus, the role of successorship on Earth and building civilizations. Yet, civilizations cannot exist without water. That is why Allāh says about the Pharaoh of Egypt and his people upon destroying them, "So We removed them from gardens and springs." (Chapter 26: 57) He also says, "How much they left behind of gardens and springs." (Chapter 44: 25)

The Pharaohs would not have been blessed with luscious gardens if it were not for the life-sustaining Nile River. However, rather than expressing gratitude, they succumbed to arrogance and oppression: "And Pharaoh called out among his people; he said, 'O my people, does not the kingdom of Egypt belong to me, and these rivers flowing beneath me; then do you not see?'" (Chapter 43: 51)

This historical example underscores the critical role of water in the rise and fall of civilizations.

## 3. Islamic Legislations for Water Sustainability

In Islam, consumption is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Muslims consume to live and to continue life on Earth, thus fulfilling the role of succession. This is in contrast to secular systems like capitalism and socialism where consumption is the ultimate goal of human endeavor and the primary purpose of life. Consumption in Islam serves higher purposes, including fulfilling the divine mandate of succession. Prophet Muḥammad was so generous that whenever he was asked for something, he would never say no (Al-Bukhāri: 5687).

### 3.1. Islamic Legislation for Water Preservation

Islam has instituted several laws to ensure water preservation. Among the most important are:

**Preventing Water Pollution:** Islamic law prohibits any action that compromises the quality and usability of water. This includes practices like salination, dumping waste, or introducing harmful chemicals into water bodies.

The Qur'ān warns against corruption on Earth and against those who would despoil the Earth. Such individuals, who cause widespread destruction, are condemned by the Creator: "And when he goes away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein and destroy crops and animals. And Allāh does not like corruption." (Chapter 2: 205)

Islam has a strong stance against water pollution. Prophet Muḥammad explicitly prohibits urinating or defecating in water to preserve its purity, saying, "Be on your guard against three things which provoke cursing: easing in the watering places and on the thoroughfares, and in the shade." (Abū Dāwūd: 26)

He also said, "Be on your guard against two things which provoke cursing." They (the companions present there) said, "Messenger of Allāh, what are those things which provoke cursing?" He said, "Easing on the thoroughfares or under the shades (where people take shelter and rest)." (Muslim: 269)

'The cursed' (الملاعنة 'Al-malā'in' and اللعائين 'al-la'ānayn') are things that bring about a curse. Prophet Muḥammad made defecating in water sources one of the causes of being cursed, i.e., being expelled from Allāh's mercy.

The Messenger of Allāh said, "None amongst you should urinate in standing water, and then wash in it." (Muslim: 282a) This is because by urinating in it, he has polluted it.

Avoiding Harm in Using Water: Islam ensures equitable access to this vital resource: water. According to the Islamic rules, "There should be neither harm nor reciprocation of harm." Islamic Sharī'ah guides us to avoid actions that could deprive others of their rightful share of water. Prophet Muḥammad states, "Muslims share alike in three things: water, herbage and fire." (Al-Musnad: 23082) This means that water, especially in public areas, is not a personal possession. It is a communal resource that should be shared fairly among all.

The Prohibition of Extravagance: Extravagance is a characteristic often associated in Islam with the devils. It is defined as a deviation from the appropriate measure in giving, whether it be excessive spending or stinginess (Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī: 9/617). Allāh says, describing the attributes of His righteous servants: "And [they are] those who, when they spend, do so not excessively or sparingly but are ever, between that, [justly] moderate" (Chapter 25: 67)

Extravagance is forbidden even in obligatory acts. For example, in Islamic law, people are instructed not to be extravagant in their ablutions (wuḍū'). "The Messenger of Allāh passed by Sa'd when he was performing ablution, and he said, 'What is this extravagance?' Sa'd said, 'Can there be any extravagance in ablution?' He said, 'Yes, even if you are on the bank of a flowing river.'" (Ibn Mājah: 424-425)

Prophet Muḥammad, by using the word يعتدون (aggress), labels excessive consumption of water as a form of aggression: "In this community there will be some people who will aggress [i.e., exceed the limits] in purification." (Abū Dāwūd: 96) Undoubtedly, wasting water is an aggression against resources and the rights of future generations to water.

Prioritizing the Use of Water: For example, it is imperative to prioritize the use of fresh, potable water for essential human needs and use of saline water for non-potable purposes. "A man told Allāh's Messenger that he sailed on the sea taking a small quantity of water with him. As he would suffer from thirst if he used this for ablution, he asked whether he might use sea water for that purpose, and received the reply, 'Its water is pure, and what dies a natural death in it is lawful food.'" (Al-Musnad: 8735)

### 3.2. Giving Water in Islam

Prophet Muḥammad says, "(There are) three (types of persons to whom) Allāh will neither speak to them on the Day of Resurrections, nor look at them (They are):--(1) a man who takes a false oath that he has been offered for a commodity a price greater than what he has actually been offered; (2) and a man who takes a false oath after the 'Asr (prayer) in order to grab the property of a Muslim through it; (3) and a man who forbids others to use the remaining superfluous water. To such a man Allāh will say on the Day of Resurrection, "Today I withhold My Blessings from you

as you withheld the superfluous part of that (water) which your hands did not create.” (Al-Bukhārī: 2240)

Moreover, he was once asked, “O Messenger of Allāh, what charity is best?” He said, “Giving water to drink.” (Al-Musnad: 23845)

The reward for giving water is not confined to giving it to humans; even giving water to animals earns one a reward from Allāh. Prophet Muḥammad said, “While a man was walking, he felt thirsty and went down a well and drank water from it. On coming out of it, he saw a dog panting and eating mud because of excessive thirst. The man said [to himself], ‘This (dog) is suffering from the same problem as that of mine.’ So, he (went down the well,) filled his shoe with water, caught hold of it with his teeth, climbed up, and watered the dog. Allāh thanked him for his (good) deed and forgave him.” The people asked, “O Allāh’s Messenger! Is there a reward for us in serving (the) animals?” He replied, “Yes, there is a reward for serving any animate.” (Al-Bukhārī: 2234)

#### **4. The Earth Is a Reservoir of Water Which Clouds Are Its Source:**

The Qur’ān mentions two scientific facts: 1) the Earth is a reservoir for water and a place where it is stored, and 2) rain is the most important source of sustainable water.

##### **4.1. The Earth Is a Water Reservoir**

The Qur’ān states that Allāh sends down water from the sky, which then permeates the Earth. This water, called the groundwater, is stored beneath the Earth’s surface and serves as a vital sustainable resource for future generations. Allāh Says, “And We have sent the fertilizing winds and sent down water from the sky and given you drink from it. And you are not its retainers.” (Chapter 15: 22) This verse unequivocally affirms that Allāh is the ultimate source and controller of water, including the reserves beneath the Earth’s surface.

It is this groundwater that Allāh has bestowed upon humanity. He has purified it, making it suitable for drinking and sustaining life. Had He chosen otherwise, He could have easily made it saline and undrinkable. Allāh says, “And have you seen the water that you drink? \* Is it you who brought it down from the clouds, or is it We who bring it down? \* If We willed, We could make it bitter, so why are you not grateful?” (Chapter 56: 68-70)

This verse underscores the crucial role of clouds in the hydrological cycle. Clouds, laden with moisture, release fresh water that replenishes rivers, lakes, and underground aquifers.

##### **4.2. Clouds Are a Source of Water**

Rain is derived from clouds. The Qur’ān acknowledges the significance of clouds as a water source in several verses. In Arabic, the word for ‘sky’ can encompass anything above, including clouds. Hence, the Qur’ān sometimes refers to clouds as ‘the sky’: “and sent down, from the sky, rain and brought forth thereby fruits as provision for you” (Chapter 2: 22)

Water plays an indispensable role in food sustainability, and the agricultural cycle starts from clouds. Allāh says, “Then let mankind look at his food - \* How We poured down water in torrents, \* Then We broke open the earth, splitting [it with sprouts], \* And caused to grow within it grain” (Chapter 80: 24-27). Food production starts from the plants that grow in the soil, but no soil can produce plants without water. It is noteworthy here that the Qur’ān’s use of the word صببنا (poured) emphasizes the abundance and great amount of water pouring from the sky.

Allāh has distributed this provision among His servants. While some regions may receive abundant rainfall, others may experience drought. Such an unequal distribution of water is a reflection of His power to create, bring life from death, and resurrect all beings: “Have they not seen that We drive water [in clouds] to barren land and bring forth thereby crops from which their livestock eat and [they] themselves? Then do they not see?” (Chapter 32: 27)

This process, which involves the descent of rain upon barren land, followed by the emergence of lush vegetation, is termed by the Qur’ān as ‘reviving the earth’. This natural phenomenon is detailed in numerous Qur’ānic verses, and serves as a powerful metaphor for the resurrection of the human soul. Just as Allāh gives life to the lifeless earth, He is capable of resurrecting the

deceased. The human body, once vibrant and alive, eventually returns to the earth as dust. However, through the divine power of Allāh, it will be resurrected and given eternal life. Allāh says, “And it is He who sends the winds as good tidings before His mercy [i.e., rainfall] until, when they have carried heavy rainclouds, We drive them to a dead land and We send down rain therein and bring forth thereby [some] of all the fruits. Thus, will We bring forth the dead; perhaps you may be reminded.” (Chapter 7: 57)

Land reclamation is an Islamic Jurisprudential legislation. It involves transforming barren and unproductive land into fertile agricultural areas through the means of digging wells, constructing canals, or diverting water from existing sources. Once the land receives adequate water, it becomes suitable for cultivation, producing crops and supporting livelihoods. Only then, an individual gains ownership rights of such a land according to certain controls in Islamic law.

Prophet Muḥammad says in this regard, “If anyone makes a barren land productive, then it belongs to him.” (Al-Musnad: 14636)

There is no doubt that increased agricultural production offers a multitude of benefits for both individuals and society at large. It plays a pivotal role in enhancing food security, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and increasing oxygen levels. All of these factors contribute to water sustainability.

Hence, we conclude that among the most important sources of water sustainability are:

Artificial rainmaking, where attempts are made to induce and increase rainfall. Saudi Arabia has been keen to utilize this technology through the National Center for Meteorology.

The revival of barren land, by extracting groundwater, constructing canals, or utilizing seawater desalination.

Water sustainability has emerged as a critical global challenge, prompting universities and research institutions worldwide to prioritize this issue. King Faisal University (KFU) is a prime example of an academic institution that has dedicated significant resources to addressing sustainability challenges. Samples of the university’s contributions in this regard could be found in a research titled [8. Hassan et al, Economic Sustainability and the Role of Educational Institutions in Promoting It King Faisal University as an Example, Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences, <https://doi.org/10.57239/PJLSS-2024-22.2.00900>]

## **5. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1. Findings**

- Water is an essential resource for all living beings, and recognizing its vital importance, Islam has instituted laws and principles to ensure its sustainability.
- Islam places great emphasis on the conservation and sustainable use of water. One of the most fundamental Islamic principles related to water is the prohibition of waste and pollution.
- By encouraging the prioritization of essential needs, Islamic teachings help to preserve and sustain water resources.
- Qur’ān emphasizes the crucial role of rain as a primary source of water, and the earth as a reservoir for this precious resource.
- Water sustainability is inextricably linked to societies’ economic prosperity and social stability. As the Qur’ān states, past civilizations achieved remarkable feats of water sustainability.

### **5.2. Recommendations**

Researchers are encouraged to undertake comparative studies between Islamic legal principles and international environmental regulations in the field of water sustainability, and utilize the methods mentioned in the Qur’ān and Sunnah to combat water pollution

Universities and scientific centers are urged to intensify research efforts in water sustainability through legitimate means, and to utilize available water resources according to life priorities.

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