



AENSI Journals

Advances in Environmental Biology

ISSN-1995-0756 EISSN-1998-1066

Journal home page: <http://www.aensiweb.com/AEB/>

Examination of the Role of Piety in Environmental Protection

¹Fath Allah Najar Zadegan, ²Hassan Rezaee Haftador, ³Narjes Malekmohammadee

^{1,2}Hadith and Qur'anic Sciences Department, University of Tehran

³M.A in Hadith and Qur'anic Sciences, University of Tehran

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25 June 2014

Received in revised form

8 July 2014

Accepted 10 August 2014

Available online 30 August 2014

Keywords:

environment, piety, Quranic teachings

ABSTRACT

Some Quranic teachings can help in the protection and preservation of the natural environment. One such teaching is that of taqwa (piety). In Quranic teachings, piety is a controlling and regulating factor in all human relations including the relationship between humans and the environment. When utilized, it plays a powerful role in personal self-regulation for environmental protection. The present article expounds the meaning of taqwa and its status in Quranic anthropology. It also explicates edificatory and motivational factors that contribute to "environmental piety". Such factors can activate taqwa, manifesting an influential function in preservation of the natural environment.

© 2014 AENSI Publisher All rights reserved.

To Cite This Article: Fath Allah Najar Zadegan, Hassan Rezaee Haftador, Narjes Malekmohammadee, Examination of the Role of Piety in Environmental Protection. *Adv. Environ. Biol.*, 8(13), 249-254, 2014

INTRODUCTION

Environmental protection is a sine qua non for today's world [1]. Inappropriate practices and overexploitation of nature in recent times have led to escalation of environmental degradation. By introducing a variety of pollutants into the environment, humans have caused a disruption in the natural order. It seems that human greed and irrational competition are essential factors in this degradation [2]. This avaricious approach to utilization of divine blessings is having serious repercussions on the environment. Environmental specialists continuously seek scientific methods for countering these detrimental effects. Until now, many scientific and juridical methods have been utilized to control overexploitation of the natural environment. One strategy for protecting the environment is adherence to Quranic guidelines.

The present study takes a descriptive and analytic approach to answering the question, "According to Quranic teachings, what function does *taqwah* have as a regulating factor in human relations in controlling human greed and facilitating better interaction between humans and the natural environment?"

Terminological Definition of Taqwa:

Taqwa is a type of verbal noun (*ism al-masdar*) from the Arabic stem of "w-q-y". In the literal sense, it means extreme avoidance, safeguarding, and care [3-5].

In Islamic terminology, the meaning of *taqwa* is in line with the literal sense of the term. Strictly speaking, it denotes safeguarding oneself and restraining oneself from violating boundaries determined by reason and Quranic teachings. Thus, where human reason considers beliefs or behaviors to be good or bad and where Quranic teachings require or forbid certain acts, *taqwa* protects the boundaries of this ethical framework [7-10].

Both sources, i.e. reason and Quranic teachings, demand protection and respect of the natural environment. In summary, environmental *taqwa* or piety is defined as safeguarding the limits and sanctity of the environment by restraining oneself from precipitating harmful environmental factors.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Piety in Quranic Anthropology:

Below, several basic issues about piety in Quranic anthropology are discussed which facilitate explanation of environmental piety.

Inspiration of Piety:

According to the Quran, all people are inspired with some level of piety [12-18]. After several oaths, the Holy Quran states, "By the soul and Him who fashioned it and inspired it with *taqwa*" (The Holy Quran 91:7-8). These verses demonstrate that God inspires the essence of piety in all humans. God has thus made piety an inherent component of human nature. Thus, every individual knows what conduct is harmful when interacting with the world around them. People know what acts stem from their impiety toward the environment and what actions are corrective and emanate from their spiritual piety in terms of environmental protection. Though sometimes people superficially justify their detrimental actions toward the environment in order to deceive themselves and others and to make their behavior seem rational and acceptable, they know in the deepest parts of their being whether or not their interactions with the environment are based on piety. Regarding this, the Quran states, "Humans are discerning of their own souls and they know what they have done, though they may offer excuses to free themselves of blame and punishment" (The Holy Quran 75:14-15).

Nevertheless, the Creator has made humans such that if they selfishly follow the path of ideological and moral deviation, they will gradually lose their inner faculty of determination. After a while, they cannot accept under any circumstances that their beliefs are false, their dispositions are corrupt, and their behaviors are indecent. They instead deem deviant acts as good (The Holy Quran 35:8) [19-23].

Impurity of the Soul caused by Impiety:

Before anything else, a person's impiety toward others and the natural environment has a detrimental effect on their own heart and soul. An impious person loses their faculty to distinguish between right and wrong in a piecemeal fashion until they see all of their own actions as good and decent. This is one of the destructive consequences of impiety. The Quran teaches that God has inspired people with piety (91:8). It stands to reason, therefore, that by protecting the environment, a person is also protecting their own souls from spiritual corruption as a result of impiety. Manifestations of impiety, such as greed and cupidity leading to destruction of the environment, issue from a person's inner being by their own free will and inevitably have negative effects on the soul. In the same manner, marks of environmental piety issue from within and pass through the filter of free will. Hence, piety and its effects have a positive influence on the soul. The Quran states, "Piety is the best attire [for safeguarding the soul]" (7:26). Just as the body is exposed to harm without clothing, so also is the soul without the garments of piety.

Piety as the Criterion for all Relations:

Piety has been presented as an extremely important and functional teaching in the Quran. In all human relations in the typology of interactions – with God, with oneself, with other humans, and with the environment – the Quran both advises piety and warns against impiety. Triggers of impiety, such as satanic temptations from the outside and carnal desires from the inside, are ubiquitous. They seek to break the boundaries of piety in each of the four aspects of human relations, compelling people into impiety and withdrawal from reason and Quranic teachings. Islamic teachings emphasize the practice of piety in all places, at all times, and in all of the four relations. These interactions must be regulated through piety (The Holy Quran 2:194, 2:223, 3:1, 4:131, 5:7, 5:57) [24].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Activation of Environmental Piety:

In order to fulfil the role of piety in interactions between humans and the environment, factors that trigger and strengthen this type of piety must be identified so they may be utilized against internal and external temptations to harm the environment and implemented for safeguarding the boundaries and sanctity of the environment. These may be divided into edificatory and motivational factors. It is reported that the Prophet of Islam (s) declared, "The entirety of piety is to learn what you do not know and act upon what you do" [25]. Accordingly, in order to achieve piety, we must acquire knowledge in areas of which we are ignorant and utilize motivational factors to activate and implement what we already know.

The following sections separately discuss edificatory factors (regarding things that we do not know and must learn about) and motivational factors (regarding things that we know and must put into practice).

Edificatory Factors in Piety:

There are many edificatory factors for stimulation of piety. Some of these include understanding the status of humans in the order of creation according to Quranic teachings as well as understanding the status of humans in their natural environment, the earth. This paper addresses the status of humans as "servants of God" in the system of creation as a whole and as "custodians of the earth".

According to the Quran, the purpose for the creation of humans is servitude to God. "I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me" (The Holy Quran 51:56). Worship refers to having

correct heartfelt beliefs and performing the inviolable acts bidden by God through reason and Islamic teachings [26, 27]. In order to achieve this purpose, God provided all the necessary conditions and prerequisites (The Holy Quran 2:29) and has made the world subject to humans (Ibid 31:20). Creation of existence, therefore, was not in vain (Ibid 21:16), and it has not been left to its own devices (Ibid 44:38); rather, the world of existence is purposive and subject to humanity. It is here that the interrelation between humans and the environment becomes manifest. The world serves humans and helps them reach their purpose, which is servitude to God (which in turn leads to proximity to God). Having said that, humans are required to advance toward this goal by correct utilization of the world.

For humans to understand their status in the order of creation as “servants of God”, they must first see the world from the perspective of Quranic teachings. This perspective advocates the following truths.

I. All constituents of existence, including the natural environment and all living and inanimate beings within it, possess some level of sentience and praise God (The Holy Quran 17:44).

II. All things within the power of humans, including both their constitutive components (such as eyes, ears, tongues, and reason) and everything in the external world, are blessings from God, and humans can never hope to even count them all (The Holy Quran 14:34).

III. Everything in existence is a sign of God, including humans (The Holy Quran 30:22). Therefore, humans as “servants of God” face a world that not only is purposive and sentient but also constitutes blessings and signs of God. A logical conclusion of this ideology is that humans are “responsible” and must not utilize the blessings of God any way they desire. They are not permitted to destroy signs of God. Such destruction is inconsistent with the status of a servant. Servants who accept servitude must limit themselves to the stipulations of reason and religious law and must consider themselves responsible toward God. Naturally, persons who do not regard themselves as servants of God and do not hold to His Will may cause destruction in the environment [28].

Advising his followers to piety or fidelity toward responsibilities they had accepted, Imam Ali (a) declared, “Be mindful of God concerning His servants and cities! Indeed, you are responsible toward developed areas as well as all living beings” [29].

Muslim scholars believe this warning by Imam Ali (a) means that everyone must seek the development of cities and prevent their ruin. Moreover, people must not torment animals and load them with more than they can bear. They must address the needs of animals for food, water, covering, shelter, and medical treatment [30, 31].

This range of responsibility even covers a person’s own limbs and organs. The Quran states, “Do not follow that of which you have no knowledge [i.e. beliefs, conducts, and sayings]. Indeed the hearing, the eyesight, and the heart – all of these are accountable (about whether they were following certainty or dubiety)” (The Holy Quran 17:36). Therefore, as servants of God and accountable entities, humans must deal with three responsibilities: understanding, protecting, and developing the world. Knowledge of these responsibilities sensitizes people to protecting the rights of other people as well as the environment. These responsibilities caution people against destruction of the natural world and notify them about their duty to protect the environment.

As per Quranic teachings, humans are not only guardians of the natural environment but also responsible for development of the earth. The Quran states, “He brought you forth from the earth and nurtured you upon it, and He asks you to develop it” (The Holy Quran 11:61). In this verse, God does not state that He placed a developed earth in the care of humans. Instead, He entrusted development of the earth to humans [30]. In this verse, earth refers to the living environment of humans. God has made humans his deputies upon the earth so that they may develop it accordingly. Hence, any act against development of the natural environment is forbidden [32].

Imam Ali (a) considers development of the earth to be a means for human livelihood [33, 34]. The Holy Quran considers destruction of the environment to be a type of corruption on the earth (The Holy Quran 7:85). The Quran describes enemies of truth as those who cause corruption on the earth: “And if he were to wield authority, he would try to cause corruption in the land, and to ruin the crop and the stock, and Allah does not like corruption” (Ibid2:205). In this way, God announces that He does not like those who destroy the natural environment and agricultural lands.

Motivational Factors in Piety:

Edificatory factors may not be able to trigger environmental piety as a person may know their responsibilities toward the environment, but not want to fulfil their obligations. Therefore, clarification must be made of how Quranic teachings make the transition from knowing one’s responsibilities to acting upon them. In order to shed light on this matter, the attributive genitive of the word *taqwa* must be considered. In many cases, *taqwa* forms a genitive case with *allah* producing the phrase “*taqwa allah*” (piety towards God) commonly found in Quranic verses and Islamic traditions. When God is the source of piety, it is more easily activated, preventing people from excess and insurrection. Of course, humans differ in spiritual characteristics and wisdom and therefore, piety is triggered within them differently. It is provoked in some people as a result of hope for the rewards of God. In others, fear of God sets it in motion. In still other people, the attraction of God’s love is more

than sufficient to activate piety. Finally, some draw on piety through their beliefs regarding God's omnipresent supervision and care. Regardless of the means, all fall under the heading of "*taqwa allah*", which involves "self-control" and "seeking perfection".

Hope for Rewards:

One incentive that triggers piety is the promise of rewards. Quranic verses and Islamic traditions extensively utilize this motivational factor. The rewards of God are diverse, hope-inducing, and invigorating. God has promised to bestow rewards upon the faithful who do good deeds (The Holy Quran 39:20). He is not forgetful (Ibid 19:64) and never breaks His promise (Ibid 13:31). Moreover, God rewards the good deeds of His servants ten-fold (Ibid 19:76, 27:89, 27:97, 34:37, 73:20).

The Prophet of Islam (s) has stated, "God will give a person who plants a tree rewards equivalent to the tree's produce" [35].

Some of God's rewards to His benevolent servants are continuously conferred upon them in this world in the form of succor and support (The Holy Quran 16:30). Some rewards even continue after death. Imam Sadiq has stated, "Among the things the Faithful benefit from after death are saplings they have planted" [35].

Fear of Punishment:

This motivating force is also discussed in many Quranic verses and Islamic traditions. It is the reverse side of hope for rewards, and people must always have a balance between fear of punishment and hope for forgiveness and reward. The Quran tells the Prophet of Islam (s), "Inform my servants that I am indeed the All-forgiving, the All-merciful, and that My punishment is a painful punishment" (The Holy Quran 15:49-50). Some punishments are swift and are inflicted in this world. Others are exacted upon wrongdoers after the life of this world and may begin from the moment of death. Thus, people must not imagine that their actions are lost or their punishments erased (Ibid 29:6). The threat of hellish punishment is the most terrible of threats. It is impossible for us to conceive of punishment in hell since its qualities and punishments cannot be compared to this worldly life or its punishments and tribulations. Even so, our actions in this world are the source of punishments in hell, and each person burns in a fire they have created by their own hands. An example of fear of punishment concerning the environment comes from a tradition by the Prophet of Islam stating, "A person who litters or pollutes a public place [such as streets and parks] is far from the mercy of God" [35]. On similar lines, Imam Sadiq has said, "Do not cut down fruitful trees for [if you do] God will send down harsh punishment upon you" [35, 36].

The Attraction of Love:

Love is the most powerful and lasting factor in activation of piety since true love is life. It brings about obedience and complaisance. A lover feels deep fear at the remoteness of the Beloved [37]. Thus, the lover utilizes piety both to withdraw from vice and anything the Beloved does not like and to do exactly what the Beloved wants so that nothing comes between them.

An example of the attraction of love concerning the environment comes from a tradition by the Prophet of Islam stating, "God is pure and loves purity, and He is clean and loves cleanliness... Therefore, you must clean the environment in which you live" [35].

Belief in Supervision and Administration:

Doubtless, belief in the fact that God knows all intentions and observes our actions (The Holy Quran 14:38,40:19,96:14) has a great motivational effect on piety. It controls people from within, everywhere, without the need for legal enforcement. Apart from it being advanced in Quranic verses and Islamic traditions, the teaching that God supervises the entirety of existence has rational justification as well. God differentiates good persons from bad. He knows who seeks to restore and protect the environment and who seeks to corrupt and destroy it. Therefore, the belief that God is aware of the intentions of people and supervises their actions in all circumstances induces people to protect the environment without fail.

Conclusion:

The instrumental role of a clean and healthy environment in human growth is undeniable. Irrespective of this fact, humans have caused extensive disruption in the natural order by introducing a variety of pollutants into the environment and through unreserved destruction thereof. Measures must be taken to protect the environment and turn back this inauspicious state of affairs. It seems that a measure that can control people from within both in private and in public and remind them of their responsibilities toward the natural environment as well as give them the motivation to fulfil their responsibilities is understanding and activating the power of piety. This power is utilized extensively in Quranic teachings and plays a key role in a person's relationship with God, with themselves, with other humans, and with the natural environment. The essence of piety is inherent within every human being. Everyone innately understands and can implement the boundaries between destruction and

restoration in utilization of the environment. However, inner rebellious factors and external attractions such as excess, greed, and satanic temptations impel people to unreasonable exploitation and destruction of the environment. Factors that trigger piety must therefore be identified and utilized to keep this inner power activated at all times. These triggers may be divided into edificatory and motivational factors. In Quranic teachings concerning edificatory factors, humans are considered “servants of God” and “developers of the earth”. Motivational factors include hope for reward from God, fear of God’s punishment, the attraction of God’s love, and belief in the universal supervision and care of God. These are numbered among the stimuli for piety. Such factors can activate piety and play an integral role in preservation of the natural environment.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ansari, A.H., Z. Zaki, 2013. The Islamic Perspective of Applicability of the Precautionary Principle in International Trade in GMOS/LMOS, *Advances in Environmental Biology*, 7(14): 4858-4863.
- [2] Shakouri B., S. Khoshnevis Yazdi, 2014. Environment and Water Pollution, *Advances in Environmental Biology*, 8(5): 1328-1332.
- [3] Farahidi, Khalil ibn Ahmad, 1994. *Tartib Kitab al-‘Ayn*. Edited by Mahdi al-Makhzumi and Ibrahim al-Samirra’i. Qum: Intisharat Uswa.
- [4] Ibn Manzur, Muhammad ibn Mukarram. 1985. *Lisan al-‘Arab*. Qum: Nashr Adab Hawzah.
- [5] Ibn Faris, Ahmad, 1994. *Mu‘jam Maqayis al-Lughah*. Edited by ‘Abd al-Salam Muhammad Harun. Qum: Maktab al-‘Ilam al-Islami.
- [6] Raghbi Isfahani, Husayn, 1995. *Mu‘jam Mufradat Alfaz al-Qur‘an*. Edited by ‘Adnan Dawudi. Beirut: Al-Dar al-Shamiyyah.
- [7] Zamakhshari, Mahmud, 1975. *Al-Kashshaf ‘an Haqayiq Ghawamid al-Tanzil wa ‘Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuh al-Ta‘wil*. Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-‘Arabi.
- [8] Tabarsi, Fadl ibn Hasan, 1986. *Majma‘ al-Bayan li-‘Ulum al-Qur‘an*. Beirut: Dar al-Ma‘rifah.
- [9] Firuzabadi, Muhammad ibn Ya‘qub. 1970. *Basa‘ir Zawi al-Tamyiz fi Lata‘if al-Kitab al-‘Aziz*. Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-‘Ilmiyyah.
- [10] Nuri, Muhammad ibn Husayn, 1962. *Mustadrak al-Wasa‘il*. Tehran: Al-Maktabah al-Islamiyyah.
- [11] Alusi, Mahmud, 1994. *Ruh al-Ma‘ani fi Tafsir al-Qur‘an al-‘Azim wa al-Saba‘ al-Mathani*. Edited by ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Bari ‘Atiyyah. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah.
- [12] Ibn Kathir Damishqi, Isma‘il, 1998. *Tafsir al-Qur‘an al-‘Azim*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah.
- [13] Tha‘alibi, ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad, 1997. *Jawahir al-Hisan fi Tafsir al-Qur‘an*. Beirut: Dar Ihya’ al-Turath al-‘Arabi.
- [14] Thaqafi Tihrani, Muhammad, 1978. *Tafsir Rawan Jawid*. Tehran: Intisharat Burhan. n.d. *The Holy Quran*.
- [15] Husayni Shah ‘Abd al-‘Azimi, Husayn ibn Ahmad. 1984. *Tafsir Ithna ‘Ashari*. Tehran: Intisharat Miqat.
- [16] Husayni Hamidani, Muhammad Husayn, 1984. *Anwar Dirakhshan*. Edited by Muhammad Baqir Bihbudi. Tehran: Kitabfurushi Lutfi.
- [17] Razi, Abu al-Futuh Husayn ibn ‘Ali, 1988. *Rawd al-Jinan wa Ruh al-Jinan fi Tafsir al-Qur‘an*. Edited by Muhammad Ja‘far Yahaqqi. Mashhad: Bunyad Pazhuhish-hayi Islami Astan Quds Radawi.
- [18] Surabadi, Abubakr ‘Atiq ibn Muhammad, 2002. *Tafsir Surabadi*. Edited by ‘Ali Akbar Sa‘idi Sirjani. Tehran: Farhang Nashr Nau.
- [19] Tusi, Muhammad ibn Hasan, 1982. *Al-Tibyan fi Tafsir al-Qur‘an*. Edited by Shaykh Aghabuzurg Tihrani and Ahmad Qasir ‘Amili. Beirut: Dar Ihya’ al-Turath al-‘Arabi.
- [20] Tabari, Muhammad ibn Jarir, 1991. *Jami‘ al-Bayan ‘an Ta‘wil Ay al-Qur‘an*. Beirut: Dar al-Ma‘rifah.
- [21] Tayyib, ‘Abd al-Husayn, 1999. *Atyab al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur‘an*. Tehran: Intisharat Islam.
- [22] Qumi Mashhadi, Muhammad ibn Muhammad Rida. 1989. *Kanz al-Daqa‘iq wa Bahr al-Ghara‘ib*. Edited by Husayn Dargahi. Tehran: Wizarat Farhang wa Irshad Islami.
- [23] Maybudi, Rashid Al-Din, 1993. *Kashf al-Asrar wa ‘Uddah al-Abrar*. Edited by ‘Ali Asghar Hikmat. Tehran: Intisharat Amir Kabir.
- [24] Najafi Khumayni, Muhammad Jawad, 1978. *Tafsir Asan*. Tehran: Intisharat Islamiyyah.
- [25] Muhammadi Rayshahri, Muhammad, 2001. *Mizan al-Hikmah*. Qum: Dar al-Hadith.
- [26] Pur Muhammadi, ‘Ali, 2008. *Mabani Falsafi Akhlaq Zisti*. Tehran: Mu‘assisah Farhangi Huquqi Sina.
- [27] Makarem Shirazi, Nasir, 1996. *Tafsir Nimunah*. Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah.
- [28] Nasr, Husayn, 2001. *Niyaz bi ‘Ilm Muqaddas*. Translated by Hasan Miyandari. Qum: Mu‘assisah Farhangi Taha.
- [29] Sharif Radi, Muhammad ibn Husayn, 1986. *Khasa‘is al-A‘immah*. Edited by Muhammad Hadi al-Amini. Mashhad: Majma‘ al-Buhuth al-Islamiyyah.
- [30] Makarem Shirazi, Nasir, 2005. *Payam Imam Amir al-Mu‘minin (a)*. Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah.
- [31] Muttaqi, Taqi, 2008. *Akhlaq Zist Muhiti Payambar Akram*. Qum: Markaz Nashr Pizhuhish-hayi Islami Sida wa Sima.

- [32] Javadi Amoli, ‘Abdullah, 2007. *Islam va Muhit Zist*. Qum: Nashr Isra’.
- [33] Hurr ‘Amili, Muhammad ibn Hasan, 1973. *Wasa’il al-Shi’ah*. Edited by ‘Abd al-Rahim Rabbani Shirazi. Tehran: Al-Maktabah al-Islamiyyah.
- [34] Ibn Shu‘bah, Hasan ibn ‘Ali, 1984. *Tuhaf al-‘Uqul ‘an Al al-Rasul*. Edited by ‘Ali Akbar Ghaffari. Qum: Mu’assisah al-Nashr al-Islami.
- [35] Javadi Amoli, ‘Abdullah, 2012. *Mafatih al-Hayah*. Qum: Nashr Isra’.
- [36] Kulayni, Muhammad ibn Ya‘qub, 1984. *Al-Kafi*. Edited by ‘Ali Akbar Al-Ghaffari. Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah.
- [37] Mishkini, ‘Ali, 1986. *Al-Misbah al-Munir*. Qum: Nashr al-Hadi.