



A Comparative Study of the Characteristics and Functions of Nature and the Position of Man in it in the Quran and the Bible with an Emphasis on the Perspectives of Imam Khamenei



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Abstract

This study aims to explore the portrayal of nature in the Quran and the Bible, examining its characteristics, functions, and man's relationship with it comparatively with an Emphasis on the Perspectives of Imam Khamenei. Both holy texts reveal that all objects and living beings celebrate God's praise (*tasbīḥ*), certain lands, like Mecca and Jerusalem, are blessed and distinguished, and the creation of the earth and heaven is purposeful. Additionally, they underscore that human sin can have an impact on nature and that disobedience of divine laws will result in unpleasant consequences. The Quran and the Bible also promise rewards for the righteous who remain steadfast in their faith, as they are declared the inheritors of the earth in this life and the afterlife. As a vicegerent of God, man is responsible for caring for nature and other creatures. This research reveals that nature is sacred and should be treated with respect and care, as it is a divine tool that can serve as a rewarding or punishing instrument by man's deeds. Those who wish to pave the way for the just rule of the righteous and revive nature and spiritual life should cultivate faith, wisdom, and righteous deeds, and strive to improve their surroundings through knowledge and labor. The key to resolving the current environmental issues lies in embracing the religious teachings found in the Quran and the Bible.

Keywords: Nature in the Quran, Nature in the Bible, Resurrection, Imam Mahdi, Return of Jesus, Rule of the righteous.

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Introduction

The nature is a recurrent theme in the Quran and the Bible. According to both books, it is the place where Adam and Eve descended. It is a wondrous setting full of enigma and wrapped with difficulties; however, this same nature is a place for the spiritual growth of man where the prophets and selected servants of God were chosen and then after their sincere obedience and patience in the face of hardships ascended to the realm of Divine proximity. Thus, nature appears like a mother who cares for its inhabitants and enforces her lessons through pain and pleasure. A teacher who has many things to say about the history of those who occupied it lived their pious or wicked lives and gave their places to the posterities. In both the Quran and the Bible, nature is depicted as having specific characteristics and functions, the knowledge of which enables man to take a better hold of his transitory residence, try to live in harmony with its rules, and choose the proper path for life. This research is a comparative effort to highlight certain characteristics and functions of nature as stated in the Quran and the Bible and man's position concerning nature with an emphasis on the viewpoints of Imam Khamenei so that it bridges the teachings of both religions and reveals their potential to prepare a better abode for humankind and the just rule of the righteous and god-fearing servants of God.

Background

Michelle Rebidoux's article, "Nine Christian Responses to the Ecological Crisis" (2018), successfully surveys the wide range of Christian responses to the ecological crisis. The article, "Elements in a Theology of Environment" (1970) by David E. Engel is an informative article which, after counting the negative views concerning the negative conception of nature according to Christian teachings, the author elaborates on the authentic Christian view which emphasises man's responsibility toward nature and the necessity of shaping a moral outlook toward nature. In the



ninth chapter of his book, *A theology of the built environment: justice, empowerment, redemption* (2004), titled “God, nature and the built environment,” T. J. Gorringer provides a detailed reference to various sources on the topic, surveys the causes of the environmental crisis, and elaborates on the implication of liberation theology on this crisis. While many books and articles have been written in this respect, this research strives through a comparative approach to highlight the commonalities of Islam and Christianity with emphasis on some of the viewpoints of Imam Khamenei concerning the characteristics and functions of nature and human role in it with the hope of providing the readers with religious insight and guidelines to have a better appreciation of the gift of nature and to protect it.

1. Characteristics of Nature

1.1. Glorification of God

1.1.1. The Quran

Verse 44 of *Sūrat al-Asrā'*, proves that all the creatures in the world celebrate God's praise, but we do not understand their glorification (*tasbīh*):

﴿تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَ
لَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا﴾ (الاسراء/ ٤٤)

“The seven heavens glorify Him, and the earth [too], and whoever is in them. There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification. Indeed, He is all-forbearing, all-forgiving.” (Quran 17: 44)

There are three main interpretations for this glorification: 1. All the creatures whether animate or inanimate possess an inner understanding of



God and celebrate His praise and glorify Him; 2. This glorification is not by the tongue; it is by their very existence and state that they glorify God and speak of His Divine attributes and perfection; 3. Some believe in the combination of the two, i.e., all the creatures with their status and tongue glorify God (*tasbīḥ-i takwīnī wa tashrī ṭ*) because some humans and all the angels by their tongue celebrate God's praise and all the particles of all the objects through their being and status glorify God (Makārim Shīrāzī 1995, 12: 134-138). Some hadiths testify to this universal praise of God by objects, animals, or even one's dress ('Arūsī Ḥuwayzī 1994, 3:168).

1.1.2. The Bible

The glorification of God by all creatures is a recurring theme in the Bible, especially in the Old and New Testaments. This theme emphasizes that all creation, including humans and the natural world, exists to praise and glorify God. Here are some key passages from "Psalms" related to this theme:

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world (Psalms 19: 1-4) ... Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD (Psalms 150: 6) ... Praise the LORD from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps: Fire, and hail; snow, and vapour; stormy wind fulfilling his word: Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars: Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl: Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth: Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children: Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven. He also exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints; even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him. Praise ye the LORD



(Psalms 148: 7-14) ... Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD (Psalms 150: 6).”

Throughout the Bible, there is a consistent message that all of creation is designed to bring glory and honor to God. This includes not only the natural world but also the actions and worship of humans. Many biblical stories and teachings emphasize the importance of acknowledging God’s greatness and offering praise and worship to Him as an integral part of faith and spirituality.

This verse from the Book of Revelation describes a vision of heavenly worship:

“And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” (Revelation 5:13).

These verses reflect the biblical theme of creation glorifying God and acknowledging His sovereignty. The idea is that all of creation, both animate and inanimate, ultimately gives praise to God in various ways. As Michelle Rebidoux states: “...in belonging to God, all creatures must be considered as having an inherent value of their own, not merely an instrumental value for humans... All creatures are said to be reflections of God’s will and being” (Rebidoux 2018, 6-7). Therefore, nature is a sacred place where all creatures engage in praising and glorifying.

Analysis

Both the Quran and the Bible acknowledge that every living or non-living thing praises the divine. They imply that all creatures possess a special awareness that brings them together to honor God’s magnificence. These



holy texts demonstrate that nature is a sacred place where God’s existence is evident. Consequently, any ignorance towards the laws of nature or failure to cherish this divine blessing is a sign that one is unaware of their role as a creation in the service of their God.

1.2. Sacred Places

1.2.1. The Quran

In the Quran, certain places are distinguished as having special sanctity and reverence in comparison to other places. In the story of Moses, the “sacred valley of Tuwa” is one of such places where God speaks to Moses directly:

﴿إِذْ نَادَاهُ رَبُّهُ بِالْوَادِ الْمُقَدَّسِ طُوًى﴾ (النازعات/١٦)

“When his Lord called out to him in the holy valley of Tuwa?”
(Quran 79:16)

﴿إِنِّي أَنَا رَبُّكَ فَاخْلَعْ نَعْلَيْكَ إِنَّكَ بِالْوَادِ الْمُقَدَّسِ طُوًى﴾ (طه/١٢)

“Indeed, I am your Lord! So, take off your sandals. You are indeed in the sacred valley of Tuwa.” (Quran 20:12)

Another sacred place where many prophets resided is Jerusalem where the sacred mosque “Masjid al-Aqṣā” is located and in the night of *mi’raj*, the Prophet was carried by God to that place:

﴿وَأُورِثْنَا الْقَوْمَ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا يُسْتَضَعُونَ مَشَارِقَ الْأَرْضِ وَمَغَارِبَهَا الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا وَ



تَمَّتْ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ الْحُسْنَىٰ عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ بِمَا صَبَرُوا وَ دَمَّرْنَا مَا كَانَ يَصْنَعُ فِرْعَوْنُ وَقَوْمُهُ وَمَا كَانُوا يَعْرِشُونَ ﴿اعراف/١٣٧﴾

“We made the people who were abased the heirs to the east and west of the land which We had blessed, and your Lord’s best word [of promise] was fulfilled for the Children of Israel because of their patience, and We destroyed what Pharaoh and his people had built and what they used to erect.” (Quran 7:137)

﴿سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي أَسْرَىٰ بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِّنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَى الَّذِي بَارَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ مِنْ آيَاتِنَا إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ﴾ (الاسراء/١)

“Immaculate is He who carried His servant on a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque whose environs We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. Indeed He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing.” (Quran 17:1)

Another blessed land is Mecca where the first house of God for worship was established by Adam, rebuilt by Noah and then Abraham, and became the *qibla* of the Muslims:

﴿إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا وَ هُدًى لِّلْعَالَمِينَ﴾ (آل عمران/٩٦)

“Indeed, the first house to be set up for mankind is the one at Bakkah, blessed and a guidance for all nations.” (Quran 3:96)

In his meeting with Hajj officials, Imam Khamenei states: “In terms of location, the blessed point of Mecca -which is the house of God and the center of unity and focus for all Muslims at all times- is situated. The pilgrim must strengthen and establish their relationship



with God there; find solace in the Quran and consider supplication, remembrance, and presence as their constant duty” (Statements were made during a meeting with Hajj officials, 25/10/1381, <https://khl.ink/f/3161>). Elsewhere, About the holy shrine of Lady Fatimah Masoumeh, he says: “Paying attention to and caring for the spiritual and emotional atmosphere, as well as the possibility of benefiting from divine guidance, should also be emphasized in this sacred place” (Note in the commemorative book of the holy shrine of Lady Masoumeh, 03/07/1372, <https://khl.ink/f/20984>).

1.2.2. The Bible

In the Bible, there are several places considered to be sacred lands or holy sites for various reasons. Here are some of the most prominent ones:

1. The Promised Land: The Promised Land, also known as Canaan, is a central concept in the Bible. It was promised by God to Abraham and his descendants as an inheritance (Genesis 12:1-7, Exodus 3:7-8, Numbers 13-14, Deuteronomy 1:7-8, and Joshua 1:2-3). The Israelites, led by Moses, eventually entered the Promised Land after their exodus from Egypt.

2. Mount Sinai: Mount Sinai, also known as Mount Horeb, is where Moses received the Ten Commandments from God (Exodus 19-20, 24:15-18, and other passages). It is considered a sacred site in both Judaism and Christianity.

3. Jerusalem: Jerusalem is one of the most important cities in the Bible. It is often referred to as the “City of David” and is central to the history and religious significance of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Mentioned in: Numerous passages throughout the Bible, especially in the context of David’s conquest of the city in 2 Samuel 5 and the construction of the First and Second Temples.

4. Bethlehem: Bethlehem is the birthplace of Jesus according to the New Testament, making it a significant holy site for Christians. [Micah 5:2 (prophecy regarding the birthplace of the Messiah) and Matthew 2:1-6 (Jesus' birthplace)]. The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem is a major pilgrimage destination.

5. Mount of Olives: The Mount of Olives is a ridge to the east of Jerusalem mentioned several times in the Bible, (Zechariah 14:4; and various New Testament passages, including Matthew 24:3, Matthew 26:30, and Acts 1:9-12). It is where Jesus is said to have prayed and where his ascension into heaven is believed to have taken place.

6. The Jordan River: The Jordan River is associated with several important events in the Bible, including Joshua 3 (crossing the Jordan), Matthew 3:13-17 (Jesus' baptism), and 2 Kings 5:14 (Naaman's healing).

These sacred lands and sites have profound religious and historical significance for believers, and many continue to be places of pilgrimage and devotion to this day.

Analysis

The Quran and the Bible both recognize certain places as sacred and revered on earth. Many of these places continue to attract pilgrims and hold great significance for believers. These locations are believed to hold a special position in which God pays attention to His servants and bestows divine blessings upon them more easily. It is important for those who cherish nature to visit these holy sites to receive such blessings and benefit from their spiritual atmosphere. These places can also serve as a gathering spot for justice-seeking, faithful servants who are united by their spiritual ties. In this way, they can help to create a better world populated by obedient servants of God. Imam Khamenei believes that holy places are where one can receive divine guidance and strengthen their relationship



with God through remembrance (*dhikr*), supplication, and recitation of the Quran.

1.3. The Purposefulness of Creation

1.3.1. The Quran

Several verses in the Quran mention the purpose behind creation (Quran 67:2, 11:7, 23:115). About the creation of the earth and everything on it is also stated that:

﴿إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لِّهَا لِنَبْلُوهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا﴾ (كهف/ ٧)

“Indeed, We have made whatever is on the earth an adornment for it that We may test them [to see] which of them is best in conduct.” (Quran 18: 7)

All the apparent attractions of the earth serve as a test from the divine. Those who recognize the true nature of this world can use its offerings to ensure their future spiritual well-being. However, those who ignore the signs of the divine and become captivated by fleeting worldly pleasures miss out on opportunities for spiritual growth. When faced with the reality of their actions in the hereafter, they will feel regretful, as the Quran reminds us: “So, whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom’s weight of evil will see it” (Quran 99:7-8).

Imam Khamenei believes that “the divine test means ‘enduring hardship to achieve a goal.’ If you want to reach from one place to another, you must traverse the path, and it is through this journey and enduring its difficulties that you undergo a test, which by enduring it, you reach your destination. Just as reaching those great peaks and challenging paths requires these experiences and trials, reaching the peak of human perfection, which is the goal and purpose of religion, also depends on

passing these tests. Without the test, the capability to reach the peak of religion cannot be achieved” (Khamenei 2016, 147).

1.3.2. The Bible

The Bible also highlights the purposefulness of creation and God’s plan for it:

“For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:16-17)

This verse highlights the notion that God’s attributes and intentions are revealed through creation. All things are crafted by God, through God, and for God. Thus, the world was intentionally created with Divine wisdom, and humans are accountable beings who must follow divine laws to achieve salvation.

Analysis

The Quran and Bible both acknowledge the intention behind creation, as the world and its inhabitants were brought into existence for a divine reason. The world is a reflection of divine qualities, akin to a nurturing environment where spiritual growth is made possible through knowledge and adherence to God. The challenges we face in life serve as opportunities for self-awareness and spiritual development. Imam Khamenei believes that enduring hardships and passing Divine tests are necessary to reach the summit of religion and attain human perfection.



2. Functions of Nature

2.1. Creation's Harmony with Man's Nature

2.1.1. The Quran

As indicated by the hadith literature ('Arūsī Huwayzī 1994, 1:41), it is believed that God has crafted the earth and all that resides within it, tailored to the needs and inclinations of humankind. From its temperature to its topography, every aspect has been intricately designed with divine wisdom to align with man's innate nature and requirements. In verse 2 of *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, after mentioning rain which is the herald of divine mercy, the mention is made of the result of this merciful bestowal: "and with it He brings forth crops for your sustenance" (Quran 2:22). Just as the rain is necessary for crops to grow and provide sustenance for humanity, receiving divine mercy is crucial for spiritual growth and closeness to God. This is why God immediately forbids humans from creating idols and setting them up as equals to Him, knowing that such idols are powerless: "So do not set up equals to Allah, while you know," (Quran 2:22), because by doing so, humans deprive themselves of divine mercy and open themselves up to divine wrath. The harmony between nature and human actions is evident in verse 96 of *Sūrat al-A'raf*, where God states:

﴿وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَكِن كَذَّبُوا فَأَخَذْنَاهُم بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ﴾

"If the people of the towns had been faithful and God wary, We would have opened to them blessings from the heaven and the earth. But they denied; so We seized them because of what they used to earn." (Quran 7: 96)

As this verse clearly shows, faith and God wariness are two important characteristics that amount to the overflow of Divine bounties. In contrast, disbelief and being heedless of Divine commands amounts to Divine wrath and retribution. As Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī explains, “*barakāt*” (blessings) refers to a great amount or number of things such as wealth, children, welfare, and peace, etc. that human beings are mainly tested by their absence (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1996, 8:201). He, also, states that the bestowal of such blessings depends on the faith of all humans or humankind, and the retribution that some receive is the reality of their deeds which is returned to them (ibid). Therefore, it appears that there is a complex relationship between natural and spiritual blessings and human nature and deeds.

About the punishment for the ingratitude towards nature, Imam Khamenei says:

Based on the Islamic perspective, and certainly the perspective of other religions, everything that exists in nature and on Earth is a divine blessing bestowed upon humanity. It is the duty of humans to express gratitude towards these blessings. If the blessings of God are appreciated and acknowledged, they will increase. This gratitude is essentially a proper and logical interaction with nature. If one has a correct and rational interaction with the phenomena of nature, nature itself will cooperate with them, meaning that nature will not suffer harm and will instead flourish. The opposite of this is stated as, «وَلَئِن» “but if you are ungrateful, My punishment is indeed severe” (Quran 14:7). If the divine blessings are disregarded, divine punishment will follow. What is the ingratitude towards the blessings of nature? It is the act of destruction, wastefulness, ignorance, or failure to utilize them properly. If this ingratitude occurs, divine punishment will be the consequence. What is divine punishment? It is the very thing we witness today as a result of



environmental destruction: diseases, disorders, deficiencies, and problems that afflict a large portion of humanity. (Khamenei 2014, 13)

2.1.1.1. Jonah in the Quran

Another Quranic verse which affirms this relation is verse 98 of *Sūrah Yūnus*:

﴿قُلْ لَا كَانَتْ قَرْيَةٌ آمَنَتْ فَنَفَعَهَا إِيمَانُهَا إِلَّا قَوْمٌ يُونُسَ لَمَّا آمَنُوا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُمْ عَذَابَ
الْخَزْيِ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَ مَتَّعْنَاهُمْ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ﴾

“Why has there not been any town that might believe, so that its belief might benefit it, except the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in the life of this world, and We provided for them for a while.”
(Quran 10: 98)

This verse indicates that the removal of punishment was a result of the people of Jonah’s faith. According to a lengthy narration from the Prophet, the people of Jonah lacked faith and disappointed him, leading to his wrath and departure. However, a wise and knowledgeable man advised them of the divine punishment, and they repented. On the day of the punishment, they left the city, separating children from their mothers and weeping in repentance. As a result, the punishment was removed, and God accepted their repentance (‘Arūsī Ḥuwayzī 1994, 2: 321-327). This significant event shows the effect of faith and repentance because God’s mercy overrides his wrath as mentioned in religious texts (Kaf’amī 1984, 249; Ibn Ṭāwūs 1990, 99; Ibn Ṭāwūs 1988, 1:363).

Martyr Muṭahharī states that what has primacy (*aṣālat*) in the system of existence is mercy, happiness, and salvation, while disbelief, transgressions, and wickedness are accidental (*āraḍī*) secondary. What is

secondary is always mitigated to some extent by the overflow of mercy. The existence of unseen aids and divine confirmations is evidence of the dominance of mercy over wrath. The forgiveness of the Lord and the removal of the consequences of sin are further evidence of His compassion and kindness prevailing over anger (Muṭahharī 2005, 1: 255).

2.1.2. The Bible

In the book of Isaiah in the Bible, there is a reference to the consequences of violating both human nature and the natural world:

“The earth mourneth *and* fadeth away, the world languisheth *and* fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant.” (Isa 24:4-5)

2.1.2.1. Jonah in the Bible

According to the Bible, Jonah’s escape from his people caused a tempest in the sea. The only solution, as Jonah himself told those on the ship, was to cast him into the sea so that the waters would calm (Jon 1:11-15). After they threw Jonah overboard, the sea stopped raging (Jon 1:15). Fortunately, Jonah’s faith in God and his prayer in the fish’s belly saved him from Divine wrath (Jon 2:1-10). When Jonah was sent to warn the people of Nineveh of Divine punishment that would befall them after forty days, they too were saved from punishment by believing in God, fasting, and showing humbleness before God (Jon 3:1-10). Therefore, the Bible also suggests that nature responds to man’s deeds and beliefs.

Analysis

Nature, as created and manifested by God, serves as a means for humans to receive blessings or punishment based on their actions. Those who are



aware of the connection between their deeds and nature strive to obtain divine rewards through faith and good deeds while avoiding punishment by following God's commands and paying attention to divine messages, such as the stories of nations that have been punished. Imam Khamenei believes that diseases, disorders, deficiencies, and problems that afflict a large portion of humanity are consequences of ingratitude toward nature.

2.2. The Earth at the Service of Mankind

2.2.1. The Quran

In the Quran, a noble status is granted to mankind, and God in verse 29 of *Sūrat al-Baqarah* says that He has created all that is on the earth for man:

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ انْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ فَسَوَّاهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ﴾

“It is He who created for you all that is in the earth, then He turned to the heaven, and fashioned it into seven heavens, and He has knowledge of all things.” (Quran 2: 29)

About this verse, Imam Ali, in a hadith, says that God created for man all that is on the earth so that he may take lesson and attain His pleasure through it and that he may protect himself from the torment of His fire through it... (Arūsī Huwayzī 1994, 1:46). Accordingly, nature is a tool for spiritual growth through faith and good deeds, but it can also become a place of punishment for those who indulge in worldly pleasures and forget about the afterlife. Thus, the role of nature is twofold: it can either aid in spiritual elevation or lead one down a path of spiritual decline depending on the choices they make in life.

Regarding the Islamic method of interaction with nature, Imam Khamenei says:



In Islam, the most comprehensive and correct approach to interacting with nature and the environment has been expressed. God has created the universe and all phenomena beautifully, skillfully, and in harmony, and we must correct our relationship with them and not destroy and pollute them with our improper actions, which would lead to calamity and hardship for society. The Islamic perspective on nature and the environment, both living and non-living, is emotional, ethical, spiritual, and guiding. ... The ultimate goal of Islam is to ensure that all generations benefit from divine blessings and create a healthy society free from class division, ready for growth and prosperity. Islamic requirements for maintaining balance and equilibrium in utilizing natural resources emphasize avoiding excess and refraining from causing harm to others. (Khamenei 2014, pp.13-14)

2.2.2. The Bible

In Genesis, concerning man's dominion over nature, God says:

“So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” (Gen 1:27-28)

In this regard, Herbert E. Ryle says:

“We observe, (1) *firstly*, that God prefaces the creation of man with a declaration concerning (a) the Divine purpose; (b) man's future nature; (c) his sphere of authority and influence (Gen 1:26); (2) *secondly*, that in a direct and special manner God creates man, in His own image, both male and female (Gen 1:27); (3) *thirdly*, that He both blesses them, and intrusts them with duties and powers upon the earth



(Gen 1:28); (4) *fourthly*, that He makes provision for their food and sustenance (Gen 1:29), as well as for that of the lower animals.” (Ryle 1921, 18).

In another part of the Bible, there is a mention of humanity’s duty towards nature:

“When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field *is man's life*) to employ *them* in the siege: Only the trees which thou knowest that they *be* not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down; and thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it be subdued.” (Deu 20: 19-20)

As such, the Bible also attests to the noble status of man and his dominion over other creatures. However, this position also entails certain responsibilities towards nature and its inhabitants the disregard of which will not only affect other creatures but also man himself.

Analysis

The Quran and the Bible approve of man’s noble status and dominion over other creatures as God’s vicegerent or steward. However, this outstanding position includes significant duties that man should fulfill concerning his fellow humans, other creatures, and nature. In addition, man’s disregard of such responsibilities or transgressing the divine boundaries can lead to undesirable consequences in this world and hereafter. Imam Khamenei believes that Islam provides a comprehensive approach to interacting with nature, which is emotional, ethical, spiritual, and guiding and entails certain responsibilities.



3. Man's Position on Earth

3.1. Vicegerency

3.1.1. The Quran

Adam as the first human being was a prophet and had a noble status as the vicegerent of God. The Quran says: “When your Lord said to the angels, ‘Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth’” (Quran 2: 30). The angels were ordered to prostrate before Adam and he was taught the Names of which they did not know:

﴿وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ﴾ (البقره/٣١)

“And He taught Adam the Names, all of them; then presented them to the angels and said, ‘Tell me the names of these, if you are truthful.’” (Quran 2:31)

Imam Sadiq was asked what is the meaning of the Names that God taught Adam? He said the names of the lands, mountains, valleys, and deserts, and then the Imam looked at the carpet on which he was sitting and said God taught him the name of this carpet as well (Ṭabrisī 1993, 1:180-181). As stated in *Nimūnih* exegesis, certainly, the teaching of meaningless words and names was not the intended purpose for Adam, as this would not have been considered an honor. Instead, the intention was to impart the meanings of these Names, along with the concepts and attributes associated with them. Accordingly, the knowledge of Names was not akin to a mere “vocabulary,” but rather pertained to the philosophy, mysteries, qualities, and attributes of things. God imparted this knowledge to Adam so that he could make use of both the material and spiritual gifts of this world in the course of his perfection (Makārim Shīrāzī 1995, 1:176).



Imama Khamenei states: “According to the noble Islamic ideology, the existence of human beings (souls) is so sacred and dignified that God attributes it to Himself and elevates it to the position of ‘God’s vicegerent’ and ‘successor’ on earth. Regardless of race, status, age, gender, color, and the like, humans are considered to be deserving of utmost respect” (Shahsawārī 2017, 265).

3.1.2. The Bible

In Genesis 2:19-20, it is written:

“And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought *them* unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. ” (Gen 2: 19-20)

F. B. Meyer opines, “That Adam was able to name the animals, affixing a title suggested by some peculiarity or characteristic, indicated his royal supremacy, and, in so far as we live in God, that supremacy is restored” (Meyer 1914, 1: 15). Herbert E. Ryle believes that “The names which man will give them will determine their use and position in reference to man’s own nature. Their names would reflect the impression produced on the man’s mind. A ‘name,’ in the estimation of the Hebrew, conveyed the idea of personality and character. It was more than a mere label” (Ryle 1921, 37).

Analysis

While the Quran and the Bible differ in their account of Adam’s knowledge of the Names and their characteristics, both represent the knowledge of the Names, which can refer to the identity and position of



different things revealing the noble status of man who possesses a divine knowledge hidden from others even the angels. In addition. Adam's knowledge was a divinely-inspired knowledge of the nature and truth of things, not merely a knowledge of specific titles or names because this knowledge was considered by the Quran as a token of his vicegerency and, in the Bible, a sign of his supremacy over other creatures. Nevertheless, man's vicegerency also entails heavy responsibilities concerning other humans and nature and its inhabitants.

3.2. Those who will Inherit the Earth

3.2.1. The Quran

About those who inherit the earth, the Quran says:

﴿قَالَ مُوسَى لِقَوْمِهِ لِقَوْمِهِ اسْتَعِينُوا بِاللَّهِ وَاصْبِرُوا إِنَّ الْأَرْضَ لِلَّهِ يُورِثُهَا مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَالْعَاقِبَةُ
لِلْمُتَّقِينَ﴾

“Moses said to his people, ‘Turn to Allah for help and be patient. The earth indeed belongs to Allah, and He gives its inheritance to whomever He wishes of His servants, and the outcome will be in favour of the God wary.’” (Quran 7:128)

This verse describes three important requirements for defeating enemies: 1. Believing in Allah for help, 2. Having patience in morals, and 3. Being mindful of God in actions (Makārim Shīrāzī 1995, 6:311). In this verse, Moses urges the Israelites to rebel against Pharaoh and advises them to seek God's help to achieve their goal of freedom from Pharaoh's slavery. He also advises them to be patient in the face of difficulties since patience is the key to overcoming hardships and leading towards good (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1996, 8:224). Therefore, righteousness leads to a favorable outcome in this world and the hereafter, as seen in the story of Moses defeating Pharaoh. The outcome of Pharaoh and his people versus Moses and his people is



explained in verse 137 of *Sūrat al-A‘rāf*: “We made the people who were abased the heirs to the east and west of the land which We had blessed, and your Lord’s best word [of promise] was fulfilled for the Children of Israel because of their patience, and We destroyed what Pharaoh and his people had built and what they used to erect” (Quran 7:137).

The Quran portrays a beautiful picture of the future of the earth which is inherited by the righteous as it is also stated in other Divine books such as *Zabūr* (Psalms):

﴿وَلَقَدْ كَتَبْنَا فِي الزَّبُورِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الذِّكْرِ أَنَّ الْأَرْضَ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ﴾

“Certainly, We wrote in the Psalms, after the Torah: Indeed My righteous servants shall inherit the earth” (Quran 21:105)

In our hadith literature, those who inherit the earth are Imam Mahdi and his companions (‘Arūsī Huwayzī 1994, 3:464). It has also been narrated from the Prophet that if only one day remains from the world’s life, God lengthens that day to the extent that a man from my household will rise and spread justice in the world as it is filled with oppression and injustice (ibid). Numerous hadiths in Islamic sources speak about the descent of Jesus and his role in helping Imam Mahdi to spread justice in the world (Baḥrānī 1995, 1:197, 2:619, 3:768, 4:133; Ibn Bābawayh 1958, 2: 202; Qummī 1983, 1:158; Ṣāfi Gulpāyigānī 2012, 2: 352-360; Suyūṭī 1993, 2:739).

According to *Nimūnih* exegesis, when discussing the addition of servants to God in the above-mentioned verse, it is important to consider their faith and belief in monotheism. The term “the righteous” (*ṣāliḥūn*) has a broad meaning, encompassing all forms of merit such as pious actions, knowledge, competence in planning, and social understanding. When servants with faith possess these merits, God will aid them in overcoming unjust rulers and inheriting the earth. It is not enough to



simply be oppressed to achieve victory over enemies and rule on earth. Faith and the acquisition of merits are also necessary. Therefore, if the oppressed do not uphold these principles, they will not attain rule on earth (Makārim Shīrāzī 1995, 13: 517-518).

Regarding the appearance of Imam Mahdi and the inheritance of the earth by the righteous, Imam Khamenei states:

The emergence of the promised Mahdi is a pivotal episode in the struggle between the forces of truth and falsehood, culminating in the ultimate victory of the righteous. The participation of an individual in this blessed event is contingent upon their actual affiliation with the group of the righteous. The verses that are referenced in the narrations indicate that the promised Mahdi is a symbol of glad tidings bestowed upon the people of faith and righteous deeds, representing the final triumph of the believers: (Allah has promised those of you who have faith and do righteous deeds that He will surely make them successors in the earth, just as He made those who were before them successors, and He will surely establish for them their religion which He has approved for them, and that He will surely change their state to security after their fear, while they worship Me, not ascribing any partners to Me) (Quran 24: 55). The emergence of the promised Mahdi is a divine gift to the oppressed and downtrodden, serving as a means for their leadership and guidance, and paving the way for them to inherit the divine leadership on Earth. (Khamenei 2018, pp. 21-22)

3.2.2. The Bible

The Bible points to the inheritance of the earth by the righteous: “Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Mat 5:5). As Albert Barnes states:

It is probable that here is a reference to the manner in which the Jews commonly expressed themselves to denote any great blessing. It was



promised to them that they should inherit the land of Canaan... When our Saviour uses this language here, he means that the meek shall be received into his kingdom, and partake of its blessings here, and of the glories of the heavenly Canaan hereafter. (Barnes 2023)

In the book of Romans, under the section titled “Future Glory,” there is a reference to the future of the world and man’s freedom from the bondage of sin and hardships of worldly existence.

“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected *the same* in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” (Rom 8: 19-22)

As H. C. G. Moule explains:

The remarkable passage, (Rom 8:19-23), demands a few preliminary general remarks. Among the many explanations of its meaning, two are the most representative and important. Of these (A) takes the passage to refer to the vague but deep longings of mankind for a better future; (B) to the longings, in a certain sense, of “creation” as distinguished from man, for a coming glory. According to (A) the doctrine is that humanity, outside the pale of the believing Church, shews in many ways its sense of weariness and aspiration; that this is an unconscious testimony to the fact of a glorious futurity; and that this futurity will be realized at the Consummation, when (not indeed all mankind, but) all from all mankind who shall have believed, will inherit the glory prepared for God’s children. According to (B) the doctrine is that the non-intelligent universe has before it a glorious transformation; that this is to take place when the saints “appear with

Christ in glory;” and that in some sense there is a longing for this in “mute and material things.” (Moule 1918, 149)

Analysis

The Quran and the Bible give the glad tidings of the inhabitation of the righteous on the earth. The faithful servants of God will inherit the earth. According to Islamic teachings, Imam Mahdi and Jesus will return to the earth to spread justice and peace, and, as such, humankind enjoys a just rule before the Resurrection. This leads to a spiritual revival of humans and a natural revival of the earth. However, this revival in the Bible seems to take place on the Day of Judgment. In the Islamic teachings before the Resurrection, humanity will experience a renewal and a just rule in whose fulfillment Imam Mahdi and Jesus play essential roles.

Conclusion

The outcomes of this research can be summarised as follows:

1. Nature, as a manifestation of God, deserves our utmost respect and care. Those who truly believe in its sanctity would never harm it or ignore others who do. Instead, they strive to educate and inspire others to honor and revere nature, just as they do.
2. The creation as a tool in the hand of God reacts per his good or evil deeds. Those who live a righteous life in obedience and servitude are in harmony with nature and receive divine bounties both in this world and in the hereafter. However, those who transgress the divine rules will face the reflection of their evil deeds both in this world and hereafter in the form of reward or punishment.
3. As a vicegerent of God, humans hold a noble status and have been granted knowledge and dominion over nature. However, this privilege comes with certain responsibilities towards the environment and its



inhabitants. Individuals must be mindful of their duties and take care of their surroundings; otherwise, they may face severe material or spiritual consequences due to their negligence.

4. The path to a brighter future lies in the hands of those who embody righteousness. Those who wish to fulfill their duties with excellence must first understand themselves and their responsibilities, and then act accordingly. They must remain mindful of their inner and outer worlds, and strive to nurture their inner qualities through faith, wisdom, and good deeds, while also tending to the needs of the world around them with hard work and prudence. By doing so, they can help pave the way for the just and noble leadership of Imam Mahdi and Jesus.

5. According to this research, the solution to the current environmental crises and hazards lies in embracing the religious teachings found in the Quran and the Bible. By adopting a spiritual perspective towards nature, seeing it as a divine manifestation and a sacred space, we can fulfill our religious obligation to preserve and safeguard it for our fellow humans and future generations.

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