



# Environmental Perspectives in the Quranic Worldview

■ Mohsen Nouraei<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The environment is one of the critical issues facing humanity today, plagued by numerous challenges. Although significant scientific and practical efforts have been made to address these problems, a complete solution is only possible by considering the transcendent teachings of the Quran and adhering to its principles. This article, using a descriptive-analytical method, examines the Quranic verses related to the environment. These verses illustrate the foundational principles of the Quranic worldview on this subject. The most important of these principles include: the purposeful creation of the environment, the balance of the ecosystem, the aesthetic appreciation of the environment, biodiversity, and the stewardship of the environment by humans. The significance of these principles is supported by the comprehensiveness, timelessness, and internal enforcement mechanisms of Quranic environmental laws.

**Keywords:** Quran, environment, stewardship of nature, ecological balance, biodiversity

---

1. Assistant Professor, University of Mazandaran, Iran. E-mail: m.nouraei@umz.ac.ir

## Introduction

With the increasing awareness of the depth of environmental disasters in the 1960s, the environment gradually became one of the most important global topics, attracting numerous scientific, cultural, economic, industrial, and political efforts. The inability to resolve this crisis led some thinkers to seek spiritual and ethical solutions to the problem, turning their attention to monotheistic religions, particularly Islam and the teachings of the Holy Quran.

The Holy Quran is the final and authoritative divine text, which, due to its comprehensiveness and timelessness, has not overlooked matters affecting human well-being in this world and the hereafter, including the environment. It has provided necessary guidance, both directly and indirectly, on this subject. Does the Quran pay full attention to the environment? Has it presented a coherent and comprehensive program in this regard, or can such a program be derived from it? What are the foundations and principles of the Quranic perspective on the environment? This article aims to answer these questions and explore some of its dimensions.

The environmental discussions in the Quran can be divided into two categories: The first category is theoretical foundations, which reflect the Quran's unique perspective on nature, such as verses indicating that nature is subservient to humans. The second category consists of practical principles and rules that determine the dos and don'ts of environmental behavior at the individual, societal, and governmental levels, such as verses that warn humans against the destruction and corruption of the earth and command them to strive for its development.

The Quranic worldview refers to the Quran's interpretation and perspective on the world and existence. Part of this worldview is focused on the environment and its various aspects. Explaining the principles of the Quranic worldview regarding the environment is essential and significant because these principles not only define environmental culture and regulate the behavior of Muslim society and Islamic governance but also serve as the strongest intellectual foundation in confronting foreign cultures. Ignorance of these principles leads to the adoption of non-Islamic beliefs, which, whether due to conflict with Islamic teachings or other reasons, can have detrimental effects and may cause

problems for the Muslim community.

The important principles of the Quranic environmental worldview include: the purposefulness of the environment, the capability, balance, and proportion of the environment, the aesthetics of nature, biodiversity, and the stewardship of the environment by humans.

## Principles of the Quranic Environmental Worldview

### a) Purposefulness of the Environment

Unraveling the mystery of creation and defining its purpose has been one of humanity's oldest intellectual endeavors. What is the divine purpose behind the creation of the universe? Is it possible to discern meaning within the act of creation? What is the ultimate reason for human existence?

Although many schools of thought and systems have attempted to answer these profound questions, they have not reached a true answer without relying on revelation<sup>1</sup>, thereby leading to incorrect conclusions (Naṣrī, 1388 SH, 75).

According to the Holy Quran, the creation of the universe and its various aspects is purposeful. The purposefulness of creation is expressed through various terms such as its inherent truth, negation of playfulness, and the rejection of futility in creation. (cf. Quran 46:3; 30:8; 64:3; 6:73; 44:38-39; 10: 7; 21:16) From the Quranic and Islamic traditions, the purposes of creation are hierarchical rather than parallel. Therefore, some of these purposes can be considered intermediate, while others are ultimate. The foundational purposes also pave the way for the realization of higher and ultimate goals.

It is necessary to remember that there are two aspects inherent in the question of the purpose of creation: the first aspect is the inquiry into the purpose of individual phenomena and creations. For example, when asking what the purpose of the environment is? It means that what is the benefit and function of the components and elements of the environment and what are these phenomena used for?

1 . Imam Ṣādiq (PBUH) in his conversation with in his dialogue with Mufaddal, identified reliance on knowledge detached from religion—which is profoundly deficient—and dependence on a materialistic, insightful worldview as primary causes of flawed interpretations of the mystery and purpose of existence. (c.f. Majlisī, 1403, 3/59)

The second aspect is to discover the motivation of the Creator of existence; that is, what is the purpose and intention of Almighty God in this act of creation? In this inquiry, we will focus on the first aspect, as the second is beyond the scope of our discussion.

Some of the important objectives include benefiting humanity and paying attention to the dimensions of monotheism (Tawhīd) and the realization of its various aspects.

### Benefiting and Serving Humanity

Benefiting humanity is one of the stated objectives of the creation of existence. The Holy Quran sometimes uses general expressions and at other times mentions specific creations, presenting them as being in service to humanity: *"He is the One who created for you all that is on the earth"* (Quran 2:29) *"It is Allah who created the heavens and the earth and sent down rain from the sky, producing thereby some fruits as provision for you"* (Quran 55:10). (For other verses, cf: Quran 2:22; 6:97; 14:32; 16:5, 10-11, 80-81; 20:53; 30:80; 40:64, 79).

The use of expressions such as *"for you"* and *"for mankind"* in the aforementioned verses indicates the reality that natural blessings are meant for all humans, regardless of religious, geographical, or racial differences among societies. It is as if the mission of these creations is to serve humanity. Therefore, the teachings of Islam and its jurisprudential rulings have been formulated to generalize the right to benefit from natural blessings for all members of society. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1402 AH, 2/74; 4/ 273)

As the Supreme Leader emphasized in his message to the first Environmental Rights Conference: *"Indeed, the lofty goal of Islam is to enable all generations to enjoy divine blessings and to create a healthy society free from class disparities, one that is conducive to growth and flourishing. It has also established religious obligations to maintain balance and moderation in the use of natural resources, avoiding excess and adhering to the principle of not causing harm to others."* (Fayrūzī, 1384 SH, 42)

It is essential to recall that the perspective of nature serving humanity is not exclusive to Islamic thought but two characteristics distinguish the Islamic viewpoint in this realm. First, nature's service to humanity is not the ultimate goal but rather an intermediate objective that facilitates the realization of

higher purposes, such as the affirmation of monotheism (Tawḥīd) and the attainment of human perfection and happiness. In contrast, non-Islamic perspectives often regard nature's service to humanity as the ultimate goal, endowed with a unique intrinsic value. The second distinction of the Islamic perspective is the emphasis on monotheism (Tawḥīd) and the recognition of the power and will of Almighty God in enabling nature to benefit humanity, while the non-Islamic schools of thought are entirely indifferent to this sublime truth.

The profound words of the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (PBUH), regarding nature's service to humanity are truly enlightening: *"Beware; the earth which bears you and the sky which overshadows you are obedient to their Sustainer (Allah). They have not been bestowing their blessings on you for any feeling of pity or inclination towards you, nor for any good which they expect from you, but they were commanded to bestow benefits on you and they are obeying, and were asked to maintain your good and so they are maintaining it."* (Nahj al-Balāghah: Sermon 143)

### **The Realization of Monotheism (Tawḥīd) and its Various Dimensions**

Monotheism is the foundation of Islamic beliefs and signifies the oneness of the origin of existence, that is, God. It conveys the truth that the Almighty God has created all of existence, and the continuity of life, as well as its control and preservation, also rests in His hands.

Tawḥīd (monotheism), the most fundamental concept in the Quran, represents the ultimate purpose of the creation of the universe and humanity. Therefore, in some verses, while addressing the various dimensions of Tawḥīd, emphasis is placed on the realization of its different aspects: *"It is Allah who has created seven heavens, and of the earth [a number] similar to them. The command gradually descends through them, that you may know that Allah has power over all things and that Allah comprehends all things in knowledge."* (Quran 65:12)

The preposition "*lām*" in the expression "*lita'lamū*" [i.e., *that you may know*] is '*lām of purpose*'. Based on this, the verse indicates that the universe was created so that humanity may become acquainted with God and attain monotheistic insight.

Similarly, in another verse, avoiding practical polytheism is presented as the result of understanding the purpose of creation: *"He who made the earth a place of repose for you, and the sky a canopy, and He sends down water from the sky and with it brings forth crops for your sustenance. So do not set up equals to Allah, while you know."* (Quran 2: 22)

Shahīd al-Thānī, referencing the aforementioned verse, identifies the acquisition of knowledge and awareness, particularly knowledge of Tawḥīd (monotheism), as the primary reason for the creation of the universe and considers it a source of pride and honor. (‘Āmilī, 1409 AH: 93; Narāqī, 1390 AH, 1/110) Imam Khomeini (RA) also regards Tawḥīd (monotheism) as the fundamental purpose of creation and writes: *"The school of divinity, in its broadest sense, and the idea of Tawḥīd with its lofty dimensions, is the foundation of creation and its ultimate goal across the vast expanse of existence, in both the unseen and visible realms."* (Imam Khomeini, 1378 SH: 21/1349; 2/19)

The monotheistic perspective of human beings enhances their threefold relationship with God, society, and the environment. It is through the belief in monotheism (Tawḥīd) that the various manifestations of the environment, such as mountains, plains, and seas, appear as cohesive components of a single reality, all becoming manifestations of the beauty and majesty of God. This perspective, which the author refers to as the *"Āyah-based outlook"* represents the most significant distinction between the Islamic view of the environment and other perspectives. The *"āyah-based outlook"* on natural phenomena guides humanity to the most fundamental reality of existence, which is monotheism (Tawḥīd).

The literal meaning of the Arabic term *"Āyah"* includes wonder, intention, pause, expectation, and sign (Jawharī, 1407 AH: 6/375). In its Quranic usage, the term conveys the meaning of a sign or indication. (cf. Ṭūsī, 1409 AH: 4/449; Zamakhsharī, 1407 AH: 2/121; Andalusī, 1422 AH: 5/58; Rāzī, 1408 AH: 20/270)

Islamic scholars, inspired by verse 53 of Quran 41 [Surah Fuṣṣilat], have divided *"Āyāt"* into two types: *Anfusī* (internal) and *Āfāqī* (external). The 'Internal Āyāt' [*Āyāt Anfusī*] refers to the intricacies of human creation and the hidden wisdom within it, while the 'External Āyāt' [*Āyāt Āfāqī*] refers to the signs of God manifested outside of human existence, in the governance of the

universe. (cf. Ṭūsī, 1409 AH: 9/138; Rāzī, 1408 AH: 7/190; Shubbar, 1407 AH: 5/386)

The truth is that a non-reflective observation of the 'External Āyāt' [*Āyāt Āfāqī*] does not bring about a monotheistic insight. Indeed, there are many individuals who, despite their meticulous study of the world, remain unaware of the Creator due to their lack of an 'Ayat-oriented' perspective: *"How many a sign there is in the heavens and the earth that they pass by while they are disregardful of it!"* (Quran 12:105)

The Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (PBUH), said in this regard: *"If they had reflected on the greatness of His power and the enormity of His blessings, they would have returned to the right path and feared the punishment of the blazing fire. But the hearts are diseased, and the visions are impaired."* (Nahj al-Balāghah: 2/115)

## b. The Balance of the Environment

Environmental balance is one of the most critical environmental issues, referring to the equilibrium and proportionality among creatures, conditions, and relationships that exist in nature. It ensures the survival of every living being and allows for the optimal utilization of natural resources. Accordingly, the quantity of every phenomenon is precisely calculated, and the necessary balance and proportion among its components are predetermined, just as this proportionality is observed among various natural phenomena.

The Quran employs diverse expressions such as *"qadar"* (measure), *"taswīyah"* (proportioning), and *"mawzūn"* (well-balanced) to signify environmental harmony. In the following sections, we will examine these terms and the verses related to them.

### The Quranic Expression of *"Qadar"* and Ecological Balance

The Quranic term *"qadar"* is a verbal noun (Muṣṭafawī, 1316 AH: 9/206) and signifies the quantity and quality of everything (Ibn Fāris, 1404 AH: 5/162; Ḥusaynī Zabīdī, 1414 AH: 7/370; Rāghīb Iṣfahānī, 1412 AH: 511). The usage of this term and its various derivatives in verses that discuss the creation of the universe indicates the existence of the principle of balance.

Further explanation is that, based on the Quranic verses, Almighty God is the Creator of all phenomena and things: *"And*

*Allah is the Creator of all things.*" (Quran 39:62; 13:16; 40:62; 6:102). By referring to the expression "*kullu shay'*" (i.e., *all things*) in the verse, which is a term of generality, it can be said that all individuals, entities, phenomena, and anything that can rightly be called a "*thing*" are creations of Almighty God.

The Quranic verses affirm the truth that the creation of all things and phenomena "*everything*" has been carried out most perfectly, accompanied by precise quantitative and qualitative measurement "*qadar*": "*and He created everything and determined it in a precise measure.*" (Quran 25:2; 13:8; 15:21; 20:50; 25:2; 32:7; 54:49; 65:3). This verse is a general statement about the presence of measurement and balance in the creation of every phenomenon.

The extent of divine measurement and the precision of Allah's design is so vast and meticulous that finding any imbalance in the expanse of existence, from the atom to the galaxy, is impossible: "*He created seven heavens in layers. You do not see any discordance in the creation of the All-beneficent. Look again! Do you see any flaw? Look again, once more. Your look will return to you humbled and weary.*" (Quran 67:3-4; 23:18; 43:11)

### **The Quranic Concept of "Taswiyah" and Ecological Balance**

The Quranic term "*Taswiyah*" also signifies balance and proportion in the environment. "*Taswiyah*" is derived from the root *s-w-y* meaning to make equal, balance, and establish moderation (cf. Ṭurayḥī, 1375 AH: 1/234; Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1412 AH: 440). The use of this term and other derivatives from the root *s-w-y* in verses that speak about the creation of existence reflects the profound truth that divine creation, in all its instances and manifestations, is characterized by balance and moderation.

Chapter 87 of the Noble Quran, while emphasizing monotheism [Tawḥīd] and calling humanity to glorify and exalt God Almighty, highlights the characteristics of divine creation: "*[He] Who created and proportioned, and Who determined and guided.*" (Quran 87:2-3)

The Arabic term "*Taswiyah*" refers to the precise and appropriate composition of components in such a way that no alternative can be conceived. The term "*Taqdīr*" denotes a specific and determined measurement. The usage of these two terms together signifies the highest degree of balance and

harmony among the components of existence and the environment.

Another set of verses also highlights the attribute of *Taswiyah* (proportioning) and balance in the creation of certain creatures by mentioning their names. For instance, the creation of the heavens, which is greater than the creation of mankind (Quran 40:57), is described as magnificent and balanced: "*He raised its vault and fashioned it.*" (Quran 79:28; 2:29)

The term *Taswiyah* in reference to the heavens means the arrangement of its components and their composition so that every part is placed where divine wisdom necessitates (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1402 AH: 20/308).

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) also described the creation of the heavens and the earth with the word "*'adl*" (justice), stating: "*By justice, the heavens and the earth were established.*" (Aḥsā'ī, 1405 AH: 4/103)

It is worth noting that authentic supplications, which are rich in religious teachings, regard *taswiyah* (proportioning) and balance in human creation as a great divine blessing that must be acknowledged with gratitude. Consider the words of the Master of Martyrs, Imam Ḥusain (PBUH), in *Du'ā 'Arafah*: "*O You Who created me and proportioned me... and safeguarded me from excess and deficiency... then You brought me into this world, complete and well-formed.*" (Ibn Ṭāwūs, 1307 AH: 2/75)

### The Quranic Term "*Mawzūn*" (Balanced) and Ecological Balance

The Qur'anic term "*Mawzūn*" is another word that refers to environmental balance. It is derived from the root *w-z-n*, meaning the measurement of heaviness and lightness and the determination of a thing's proportion (Ibn Manẓūr, 1414 AH: 13/1346; Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1412 AH: 1868; Muṣṭafawī, 1416 AH: 13/97).

An example of its usage can be seen in the following verse: "*And We spread out the earth, and cast in it firm mountains, and We grew in it every kind of balanced thing.*" (Quran 15:19)

The Quranic exegetes have presented various interpretations regarding the final phrase of the verse "*wa anbatnā fīhā min kullī shay'in mawzūn*" [*and We grew in it every kind of balanced thing*] (Quran 15:19), which serves as our focal point.

Some scholars have understood "*mawzūn*" as referring to all

extractable minerals whose quantities are determined by weight, such as gold, silver, and iron. Others, taking a broader view, interpret it as a reference to all created entities, which have been brought into existence with a precise and determined volume and measure (Ṭūsī, 1409 AH: 6/326; Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1402 AH: 12/39; Ṭabarsī, 1372 AH: 6/512-513; Baghawī, 1420 AH: 3/54).

Based on the second interpretation, the aforementioned verse highlights the fact that the creation of all beings is founded on balance and proportion. *"According to these verses, various provisions and resources have been prepared for the survival of both human and non-human beings, ensuring that the demand for these resources is matched by their supply."* (Akhtar, 1381 SH: 8)

### c. Biodiversity

The term 'biodiversity' is a modern concept in environmental science that is closely linked to ecological balance. It refers to the diversity of animals, plants, and microorganisms within an ecosystem. According to a report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the number of identified species on Earth is approximately 13,600,000 (Ardakānī, 1388 SH: 108).

The abnormal extinction of a single species can cause significant disruptions in the life processes and activities of other species connected to it<sup>1</sup>. Biodiversity plays a crucial role in food security, the provision of medicinal resources, the creation of scenic landscapes, and the establishment of natural recreational areas.

Perhaps one of the clearest Quranic references to biodiversity can be found in Chapter 35: *"Have you not regarded that Allah sends down water from the sky, with which We produce fruits of diverse hues. And in the mountains are stripes, white and red, of diverse hues, and [others] pitch black? And of humans and beasts and cattle there are likewise diverse hues."* (Quran 35: 27–28)

In these two noble verses, the diversity of environmental elements is highlighted, such as multicolored fruits, mountains, and pathways with their varied hues, and the diversity among people, animals, and livestock. (For other

1. The biodiversity on Earth is declining at an unprecedented rate, approximately 1,000 times faster than the natural rate. For this reason, the year 2010 was designated as the International Year of Biodiversity.

examples, Quran 6:3, 99, and 141; 20:53; 39:21).

In other verses, the diversity of environmental elements is recognized as a sign (*ayah*) of Almighty God, serving as a source of reflection and lesson for those who possess intellect and faith: *"And [He disposed for your benefit] whatever He has created for you in the earth of diverse hues—there is indeed a sign in that for a people who take admonition."* (Quran 16: 13) *"Have you not seen that Allah sends down water from the sky, then He conducts it through the ground as springs. Then He brings forth with it crops of diverse hues. Then they wither and you see them turn yellow. Then He turns them into chaff. There is indeed a lesson in that for those who possess intellect."* (Quran 39: 21, Quran 6: 3, 99)

In addition to what has been mentioned, some narrations also emphasize biodiversity and the necessity of its preservation. For instance, the following narration states: *"He [Imam Ṣādiq (PBUH)] was asked about cutting down a tree, and he (a.s) said: 'There is no harm in it.' I asked: 'What about the Sidr [Lote] tree?' He replied: 'There is no harm in it! It is only discouraged to cut down the Sidr [Lote] tree in the desert because they are scarce there, but here, there is no objection to it.'"* (Kulaynī, n.d., 5/264)

In this narration, the utilization of natural resources is considered permissible. The reason for the prohibition of cutting down the *Sidr [Lote]* tree in the wilderness is its rarity—an explanation that, in modern scientific terms, aligns with the principles of biodiversity conservation and environmental protection.

#### d. Aesthetic Aspects of the Environment

Another outstanding feature of Islam's perspective on the environment is its emphasis on the astonishing beauty of nature and its various manifestations. In addition to highlighting the inherent monotheistic aspect of the natural world, Quranic verses, and authentic narrations emphasize the beauty of creation. It is worth noting that, in the Islamic worldview, the enchanting beauty of nature is not merely a matter of poetic imagery or artistic description. Rather, it is an objective and tangible reality that reflects the knowledge and wisdom of the One Creator. The Quran particularly draws attention to the beauty of nature, the sky, and the elegance of animals, making them profound points for contemplation.

The term *"Bahjah"* and its derivatives are among the most

frequently used Quranic terms in depicting the beauty of nature. "*Bahjah*" signifies a form of beauty that is delightful and joy-inspiring—such as the pleasure one experiences when gazing at blooming flowers, lush trees, and verdant gardens. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1402: 18/509)

In this regard, the following verses can be mentioned: "*And We spread out the earth, and cast in it firm mountains, and caused every delightful kind [of vegetation] to grow in it.*" (Quran 50: 7; 22: 5; 35:27-28) "*Is He who created the heavens and the earth, and sends down for you water from the sky, whereby We grow delightful gardens...*" (Quran 27: 60) "*...And you see the earth torpid, yet when We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells, and grows every delightful kind [of plant].*" (Quran 22: 5)

The Holy Quran, among the various natural beauties of the earth, places particular emphasis on the beauty of vegetation. Perhaps the reason for this is the continuous growth and dynamic nature of plant-based beauty. The freshness, vibrancy, and diverse coloring found in plants and trees are rarely observed to the same extent in other elements of creation (Kharaqānī, 1391 SH: 153).

Hadith literature also underscores the beauty and splendor of nature and the environment. An example of this is found in the words of Imam al-Ṣādiq (a.s) in his discourse with Mufaḍḍal. (Majlisī, 1403 AH: 3/129; Ṣadūq, 1403 AH: 237; Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, 1409 AH: 20/60)

In the Quranic worldview, the beauty of other aspects of the environment is also emphasized, such as the magnificence of the sky and living beings. Consider the following verses: "*We have certainly adorned the lowest heaven with lamps.*" (Quran 67:5; 22:16; 37:6; 41:12) "*He created the cattle, in which there is warmth for you and [other] uses, and some of them you eat. There is in them a beauty for you when you bring them home for rest and when you drive them forth to pasture. And they bear your burdens to towns, which you could not reach except by straining yourselves. Indeed, your Lord is most kind and merciful. And horses, mules, and asses, for you to ride them, and for pomp, and He creates what you do not know.*" (Quran 16:5-8)

#### e. The Subjugation of the Environment

The concept of 'subjugating nature' is one of the significant

themes in the Quran. Various questions arise in this regard: Does subjugation imply the utilization of nature, or does it signify ownership? What is the difference between the Islamic perspective on subjugating nature and the excessive exploitation of nature by Western civilization? How can the subjugation of nature be managed, and upon what principles should it be based? In the following, we will address these questions.

### Literal Meaning of "Taskhīr" (Subjugation)

The word "*Taskhīr*" is derived from the root "*s-kh-r*" in the *taf'īl* verbal form, and it conveys several meanings: Taming, making obedient, compelling something into service without payment (Jawharī, 1407: 2/680; Askarī, 1412: 50; Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 1412: 232; Ibn Athīr al-Jazarī, 1364: 2/150; Fayrūzābādī, n.d.: 2/46). Ṭabarsī defines "*Taskhīr*" as *making something subservient* (Ṭabarsī, 1372: 19/185). 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī explains: "*Taskhīr means compelling an agent to act in such a way that the action is not performed by the agent's own will, but rather by the will of the one who subjugates it—just as a writer compels a pen to write according to his intention.*" (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1402 AH: 6/342) Thus, the term "*Taskhīr*" refers to the subjugation or harnessing of something for a specific purpose.

### A Brief Overview of the Verses on the Subjugation of Nature

The verses related to the subjugation of nature can be classified into three groups:

1. **Group One:** Verses that use the expression "*sakhkhara lakum*" [i.e., *disposed for you*], indicating that the entire environment or some of its elements are made subservient to humans. For example: "*Do you not see that Allah has disposed for you whatever there is in the heavens.*"<sup>1</sup> (Quran 31:20; 13:2; 14:32-33; 16:12-14; 22:65; 45:13-12).
2. **Group Two:** Verses that use expressions like "*wa khalaqa lakum*" [i.e., *We created for you*] or "*wa ja'ala*

---

1. It is worth noting that there are other verses that refer to the concept of "*Taskhīr*" without explicitly mentioning the one for whom it is subjugated (i.e., humans). For example: Quran 7:10; 16:5, 11, and 14; 29:21; 31:29; 35:13 and 27; 39:5; 55:10; 79:32.

*lakum*" [i.e., *We made for you*], which indicate the creation of nature for the benefit of humankind. For example: "*It is He who created for you all that is in the earth*" (Quran 2:29; 67:15).

For similar verses, but with less explicit or comprehensive wording, see: Quran 2:22; 17:66, 70; 20:53-54; 61:80; 40:64; 43:10-13; 67:15; 71:19-20<sup>1</sup>.

**3. Group Three:** Verses that describe the subjugation of nature for certain prophets and its miraculous nature. For example: "*So We disposed the wind for him, blowing softly wherever he intended by his command*" (Quran 38:36; 2:60; 7:73; 11:64; 21:79; 26:63).

Considering the content of the three groups of verses, the first and second groups can be referred to as the verses of "general subjugation," while the third group can be called the verses of "specific subjugation." This is because the verses of the first two groups signify that nature is subdued for all human beings. However, the verses of the third group indicate that nature is subjugated for specific individuals, namely the prophets (peace be upon them). It is worth mentioning that this group of verses falls outside the scope of the present study.

### The Reality of Subjugation (*Taskhīr*)

At this point, a fundamental question arises: In the Quranic perspective, what is the true meaning of "*Taskhīr*" (subjugation)? Is nature inherently subjugated to humans, or is its subjugation merely a potential characteristic? In other words, does "*Taskhīr*" mean that God Almighty has made nature subservient to humanity without considering human effort? Or does it mean that humans, through intellect, knowledge, and experience, unlock the secrets of nature and subjugate it themselves?

Attention to the semantic analysis of the preposition "*Lām*" in

---

1. Although these types of verses do not explicitly speak about the subjugation of nature for humans, their harmony with the verses of the first group can be explained as follows: On one hand, the very creation of the world for humans necessitates the availability of the means and opportunity to utilize nature. If humans were unable to benefit from the world and its bounties, the creation of the world for them would be meaningless. On the other hand, it is abundantly clear that benefiting from nature is only possible if it is made subservient.

the Qur'anic expression "*wa sakhkhara lakum*" (i.e., *disposed for you*) helps clarify this question. The preposition "*Lām*" in this phrase could indicate one of three meanings:

1. For benefit (*lām al-intifāʿ*), meaning that the benefits of nature are at the service of humans.
2. For purpose and end goal (*lām al-taʿlīl al-ghāʾī*), indicating that nature was created to serve human needs.
3. For ownership (*lām al-milk*), suggesting that as human knowledge gradually advances, their control and dominion over nature increase.

Based on the apparent meaning of the relevant Quranic verses, the first two interpretations seem stronger. The apparent meaning of these verses indicates that nature has been subjugated and tamed to serve the interests of the one for whom it is subjugated (i.e., humans), rather than implying that humans are inspired or empowered to harness nature and utilize its bounties through their intellect and knowledge. In this regard, the following verse can be cited as evidence: "*Do you not see that Allah has disposed for you whatever there is in the heavens and whatever there is in the earth.*" (Quran 31:20)

In this verse, reference is made to the subjugation of everything in the heavens and the earth, not to teach or inspire how to subjugate earthly and celestial beings and phenomena for humans.

Another evidence supporting the correctness of the first and second probabilities is the subjugation of the sun and the moon, explicitly mentioned in some verses (Quran 14:33). It is self-evident that the sun and the moon are never owned by humans; only their benefits have been placed at the service of mankind.

The analysis of the interpretation provided by many exegetes and scholars indicates that they, by accepting either the first or the second probability, have considered the preposition "*lām*" in "*lakum*" to signify either the "*lām of benefit*" or the "*lām of ultimate purpose*." Examples include Shaykh Ṭūsī, 6/972; Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1418 AH: 2/97; Haqqi Burusawī; Fakhr al-Rāzī, and Mutahhari, 1377 SH: 2/115).

Two points are essential to mention here:

First, the subjugation (*Taskhīr*) is a universal and all-encompassing phenomenon because the pronoun "*kum*" in

"*sakhkhara lakum*" [i.e., *disposed of for you*] indicates the universality of the subjugation for all human beings.

Second, the subjugation is perpetual and not restricted to a specific time, as can be inferred from the term "*dā'ibayn*" in the following verse: "*He disposed the sun and the moon for you, constant [in their courses], and He disposed the night and the day.*" (Quran 14:33) The term *da'b* means habit and custom, which inherently conveys the concept of continuity (Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 1412 AH: 1/694; Mustāfawī, 1416 AH: 3/169). In this verse, too, *da'b* signifies a perpetual and continuous habit that is not confined to a specific time.

### The Connection Between the Subjugation of Nature and Other Qur'anic Concepts

According to the verses of the Quran, human beings are the vicegerents of God on Earth: "*When your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth.'*" (Quran 2:30; 6:165; 7:69; 10:14; 27:62; 35:39)

Some contemporary Quranic exegetes, relying on contextual evidence, have argued that the intended meaning of vicegerency (*khilāfah*) is humanity's succession as God's representative on Earth, not that humans are successors to a previously extinct group of inhabitants. Another point to note is that human vicegerency is not exclusive to Prophet Adam (PBUH); rather, his descendants also share in this position with him. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1402 AH: 1/178)

Humanity's vicegerency on behalf of Almighty God brings with it numerous privileges and responsibilities, which will undoubtedly be accounted for on the Day of Judgment. One of the most significant of these is the duty of trustworthiness and the proper safeguarding of the position of divine vicegerency: "*Then We made you successors on the earth after them that We may observe how you will act.*" (Quran 10:14)

For this reason, humans are expected to treat the environment with kindness and care, just as the Almighty Creator has preserved it and showered His mercy upon it.

The position of divine vicegerency for humanity is also directly connected to the Quranic concept of "making the earth a habitat": "*He brought you forth from the earth and made it your habitation.*" (Quran 11:61)

According to at least some interpretations of this verse, the responsibility for cultivating and developing the earth and its environment has been entrusted to humanity.

Based on the above, it becomes clear that humanity is God's vicegerent on Earth, tasked with cultivating it to create the necessary conditions for their own growth and that of others. Human trustworthiness demands responsible behavior toward nature, avoiding both excess and negligence.

### Critique of a Perspective

Some, in tracing the roots of the environmental crisis, resort to deflection and, at times, bias, blaming religion and its lofty teachings as the cause of this crisis. Lynn White Jr., for instance, attributes the environmental crisis to the dominion granted to humanity by the Bible, which he interprets as religious permission to exploit nature. (Farāhānī-Fard, 1385 SH: 22/94)

Others, such as the medieval historian Lynn White, believe in the negative role of religion in this crisis. He argues that the emphasis of Judaism and Christianity on the transcendence of God over nature and humanity's dominance over it has led to a lack of respect for nature and, consequently, the destruction of its resources in pursuit of self-serving goals. (Haddādī, 1387 SH: 3/26)

Firstly, in criticizing this viewpoint, it should be noted that there is no logical correlation between the environmental crisis and religion. Both religious and non-religious societies face this crisis equally.

Secondly, the concept of subjugation (*Taskhīr*) does not imply domination or exploitation but rather refers to the availability of nature's benefits for humanity as God's vicegerent. While humans are indeed stewards of this world, their stewardship is entrusted to them as a responsibility, bound by ethical and moral principles.

Therefore, humanity's representation of God on Earth and the subservience of nature to humans do not, in themselves, lead to environmental degradation. On the contrary, numerous religious teachings emphasize the protection of the environment, addressing its various dimensions and issuing necessary warnings. It is only those individuals who fail to adhere to divine laws who endanger the health and sustainability of the environment.

## Conclusion

1. The Quran provides valuable explicit and implicit guidance on the environment, enabling the extraction and formulation of a comprehensive Quranic worldview on environmental ethics.
2. The environment, prior to human intervention, is a purposeful, balanced, and self-repairing system created to support the ultimate purpose of human creation, that is, gaining proximity to God, as well as the growth and perfection of all creatures.
3. In the Quranic worldview, the environment is deeply tied to monotheism (*Tawḥīd*), which is the foundation of Islam. The theoretical discussions and practical obligations of Islam regarding the environment are directed toward this central concept.
4. The subjugation (*Taskhīr*) of nature signifies that God Almighty has subdued nature for humanity, creating it in such a way that its blessings align with the fulfillment of human needs.
5. The subjugation of nature is incompatible with domination and hostile exploitation.
6. The right to benefit from the environment is universal. Therefore, individual or governmental use of natural resources must not prevent or hinder others from enjoying the same benefits.
7. Specialized knowledge of the environment is essential, as limiting oneself to superficial use of nature amounts to ingratitude for the noble blessing of "the subjugation of nature."
8. Disrupting the balance of nature is contrary to ethical environmental conduct and Quranic teachings, as the order of nature reflects God's power and serves as a manifestation of His creation and oneness.

## References

Nahj al-Balāghah

1. ‘Āmilī, Zayn al-Dīn ibn ‘Alī. (1409 AH). *Munyat al-Murīd fī adab al-Mufīd wa al-Mustafīd*. Qom: Maktab al-A‘lām al-Islāmī.
2. ‘Askarī, Abū Hilāl. (1412 AH). *Mu‘jam al-Furūq al-Lughawiyyah*. Qom: Mu‘assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī.
3. Aḥsā’ī, Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Abī Jumhūr. (1405 AH). *‘Awālī al-La‘ālī al-‘Azīziyah fī al-Aḥādīth al-Dīniyah*. Qom: Sayyid al-Shuhadā’ Publications.
4. Akhtar, Muḥammad Ramaḍān. "Towards an Islamic Approach For Environmental Balance." Translator: ‘Abbās ‘Arab Māzār and Ḥasan Dādگیر. *Iqtisād Islami Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 8, Winter 1381 SH.
5. Andalusī, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn Ghālīb. (1422 AH). *Al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-‘Azīz*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah.
6. Ardakānī, Muḥammad Riḍā. (1388 SH). *Ikolozhī*. Tehran: University of Tehran.
7. Baghawī, Husayn ibn Mas‘ūd. (1420 AH). *Mu‘ālim al-Tanzīl fī Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī.
8. Farāhānī-Fard, Sa‘īd. "Muḥīt Zīst Mushkilāt wa Rāh-hāy Barūn-Raft az Manzar Islām." *Iqtisād Islāmī Journal*, No. 22, Summer 1385 SH.
9. Fayḍ Kāshānī, Muḥsin. (1418 AH). *Al-Aṣfā fī Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*. Qom: Daftar-i Tabliḡhāt-i Islāmī.
10. Fayrūzābādī, Muḥammad ibn Ya‘qūb. (n.d). *Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīt*. Beirut: Mu‘assasah al-‘Arabīyah li-Ṭibā‘ah wa-al-Nashr.
11. Fayrūzī, Maḥdī. "Mabānī Ḥaqq Bihrāwandī az Muḥīt Zīst-i Sālim dar Qur‘ān Karīm." *Rawāq Andīsesh Journal*, No. 42, 1384 SH.
12. Haddādī, Muḥsin. "Mabānī Akhlāq Zīst-Muḥītī dar Adyān." *Iṭtilā‘āt-i Hikmat wa Ma‘rifat Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1387 SH.
13. Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan. (1409 AH). *Wasā’il al-Shī‘ah ilā Taḥṣīl Masā’il al-Sharī‘ah*. Qom: Āl al-Bayt.
14. Ḥusaynī Zabīdī, Sayyid Muḥammad Murtaḍā. (1414 AH). *Tāj al-‘Arūs min Jawāhir al-Qāmūs*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.
15. Ibn Athīr al-Jazarī, Mubārak ibn Muḥammad. (1364 SH). *Al-Nihāyah fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīth wa-al-Athar*. Qom: Ismā‘īlīān Publications.
16. Ibn Fāris, Aḥmad. (1404 AH). *Mu‘jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah*. Qom: Maktabat al-I‘lām al-Islāmī.
17. Ibn Manzūr, Muḥammad ibn Mukarram. (1414 AH). *Lisān al-‘Arab*. Beirut: Dār Šādir.
18. Ibn Tāwūs, Sayyid ‘Alī ibn Mūsā. (1307 SH). *Iqbāl al-A‘māl*. Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyah.
19. Jawharī, Ismā‘īl ibn Ḥammād. (1407 AH). *Al-Šiḡāḥ*. Beirut: Dār al-Malāyīn li al-‘ilm.
20. Kharaqānī, Ḥasan. (1391 SH). *Qur‘ān va Zībā-Shināsī*. Mashhad: Islamic Sciences University of Razavi.
21. Kulaynī, Muḥammad ibn Ya‘qūb. (n.d). *Al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*. Editor: ‘Alī Akbar Ghaffārī. Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyah.

22. Majlisī, Muḥammad Bāqir. (1403 AH). *Biḥār al-Anwār: Al-Jāmi‘ah li-Durar Akhbār al-A‘immah al-Athār*. Beirut: Mu‘assasah al-Wafā’.
23. Musavi Khomeini, Sayyid Ruḥullah. (1378 SH). *Ṣaḥīfah Nūr*. Tehran: Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works.
24. Muṣṭafawī, Ḥasan. (1416 AH). *Al-Taḥqīq fī Kalimāt al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm*. Tehran: Ministry of Islamic Guidance.
25. Mutahhari, Morteza. (1377 SH). *Majmū‘ah-yi Āthār*. Tehran: Sadra Publications.
26. Narāqī, Muḥammad Mahdī. (1390 SH). *Jāmi‘ al-Sa‘ādāt*. Editor: Muḥammad Kalāntar.
27. Naṣrī, ‘Abd Allāh. (1388 SH). *Falsafeh Āfarīnīsh*. Tehran: Daftar Nashr Ma‘arif.
28. Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad. (1412 AH). *Al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur‘ān*. Damascus-Beirut: Dār al-Shāmīyah.
29. Rāzī, Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī. (1408 AH). *Rūḥ al-Jinān wa-Rūḥ al-Jinān fī Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*. Mashhad: Āstān-i Quds-i Razavi Research Institute.
30. Ṣadūq, Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn ibn Bābawayh Qummī. (1403 AH). *Al-Khiṣāl*. Qom: Jāmi‘ah-i Mudarrisīn.
31. Shubbar, Sayyid ‘Abd Allāh. (1407 AH). *Al-Jawhar al-Thamīn fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Mubīn*. Kuwait: Maktabat al-Alfayn.
32. Ṭabarsī, Faḍl ibn Ḥasan. (1372 SH). *Majma‘ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*. Tehran: Nasir Khosrow.
33. Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn. (1402 AH). *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*. fourth edition. Qom: Intishārāt Islāmī.
34. Ṭurayhī, Fakhr al-Dīn. (1375 SH). *Majma‘ al-Baḥrayn*. Tehran: Murtaḍawī.
35. Ṭūṣī, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan. (1409 AH). *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*. Editor: Aḥmad Ḥabīb Qaṣīr al-‘Āmilī.
36. Zamakhsharī, Maḥmūd. (1407 AH). *Al-Kashshāf ‘an Ḥaqā’iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl*. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī.