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KHUTBAH FOR WORLD WATER DAY

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World Water Day

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Tomorrow, Saturday 22 March 2014, is World Water Day. World Water Day has been observed since 1993 when the United Nations General Assembly declared 22 March as “World Day for Water.” One of the principal aims of World Water Day is to focus public attention on the critical water issues of our times and to conscientise citizens of the world with regard to the dire need to conserve water.

The purpose of today’s khutbah is to remind us that the conservation of water and more broadly environmental consciousness should be an integral part of what it means to be a conscientious Muslim. An environmentally conscious Muslim is someone who lives in reverence and harmony with nature and uses water and all other natural resources frugally and sparingly.

In this regard, the companion, Abu Sa’id al-Khudri narrated in the hadith

collection of Jam'ī al-Tirmidhi, that the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's everlasting peace and blessings be upon him) advises us as follows:

“The world is green and delightful and God has made you a custodian over it (the world) and is observing carefully how you deal with it.”

The Critical Need for Water Conservation

On World Water Day, the United Nations releases its annual World Water Development Report (WWDR). According to a recent World Water Development Report, 2.4 billion people – or just fewer than half of the world's population – have no adequate water supply for their daily needs. It is also estimated that as a direct result of poor hygiene and lack of access to water and proper sanitation, 1.5 million children under the age of five die every year because of diarrhoeal diseases alone.

If you were thinking that the water crisis is only relevant to the developing regions of the world, it is instructive to note that the U.S. Population has doubled over the past 50 years, tripling the thirst for water, and analysts estimate that at least 36 states will face water shortages by 2014. So the need to conserve water is becoming critical not only in the developing regions of the world but also right in the US.

Even more alarming, however, is the prediction by environmentalists and other conflict analysts that as a result of the high numbers of international water courses which are shared between countries, future wars will more likely be fought as a result of competition over water resources. It has thus become critical for all citizens of the world to rise up to meet this contemporary global challenge by changing our uncaring approach to water consumption.

The Centrality of Water in the Glorious Qur'an

What inspiration and guidance can we derive from the teachings of Islam to assist us in joining the rest of humanity in conserving our water resources? God, the Sustainer of all Life, draws our attention to the centrality of water in the ecosystem in numerous verses of the Glorious Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an affirms the profound significance of water to human existence when it proclaims in Surah al-Anbiya (The Prophets), Chapter 21, Verse 30:

“We made from water every living thing.” (Q 21:30)

From this verse we learn that God created water as the source and origin of all life. Plants, animals and humans depend on water for life and existence. Without water, life on this planet would cease to exist or continue. We know from scientific research that 72% of the surface of the globe is covered with water, and that 80% of the human body consists of water.

Furthermore, in Surah al-An’am, Chapter 6, Verse 99 God proclaims:

“It is He (God) who sends down rain from the skies.
With it we produce vegetation of all kinds.” (Q 6:99)

In addition to this vital life-giving function of water, it also has a socio-religious function. Muslims use water as spiritual purification and cleansing of the body and clothes from all dirt, impurities and defilement. We purify ourselves using water so that we may encounter our Creator clean, pure and purged. For God proclaims in the Qur’an, Chapter 8, Verse 11:

“And He (God) caused rain to descend on you from heaven
to clean therewith” (Q 8:11)

Muslim Juristic Principles on the Equitable Use of Water Resources

Because water is such a highly valued and precious resource Muslim scholars on the basis of sound principles in *usul al-fiqh* (jurisprudence) have emphasized its fair and equitable distribution. There are two fundamental Islamic precepts that guide the right to water. First, the right of thirst establishes the universal right for humankind to quench their and that of their animals thirst, and second, the right of irrigation which gives users the right to water their crops. Various *ahadith* i.e. traditions passed down from Prophet Muhammad, relate to who has the priority over water and whether or not it can be owned.

Some prophetic traditions relate to the quantity of water one is allowed to take for drinking or irrigation and others prohibit the overuse of water sources even when there is an abundant amount available.

Using these same Islamic evidences some contemporary scholars have argued that even Muslim rituals of worship, such as *salah*, *zakat*, fasting and *hajj* need to be rendered eco-friendly. Such an endeavour would capture not only the spirit behind these acts of worship but also their correct execution. In this regard I would like to cite an instructive quote from the life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). It is related by the companion, ‘Abdullah ibn

'Umar, in the hadith collection of Ibn Majah, that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) passed by his companion Sa'ad, who was performing his wudu (ablutions), and said the following:

“What is this wastage, O Sa'ad?”

“Is there wastage even in (such a sacred act as) washing for prayer?” asked Sa'ad; and he (the Prophet) said, “Yes, even if you are by a flowing river!”

The message is crystal clear: Do not waste water, even if you perform your prayer ablutions.

Water Conservation is Part of Being a Conscientious Muslim

We should all work harder to save water and try not to be wasteful in our consumption of this precious resource. I would especially like to urge all of us to reduce our consumption of water when taking prayer ablutions. Every time we make wuu, it would be useful to remind ourselves that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) used a third of a litre to make his wufu – that is less than a can of soft drinks.

Another practical way in which we can reduce our water consumption is by challenging ourselves and our families to take shorter showers. Cutting down our shower time by one minute not only decreases wastage, but can also have a substantial effect on our water bill.

In a society spoilt by choice, we should commit ourselves to favouring greener options in all aspects of our lives – even exploring options for greening our Islamic Centre. For more detailed ideas and a unique approach to how we as Muslims can live eco-ethical lifestyles, I would highly recommend the book *Green Deem What Islam Teaches about Protecting the Planet* by Ibrahim Abdul Matin (2012) (an environmental policy consultant). In this practical book he covers a range of topics such as water, energy and food waste, and shares a number of ideas that aim to inspire a faith-based commitment to protecting the environment.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude this khutbah by encouraging all of us to drink many more glasses of water daily and to recite the same supplication that pilgrims do when they drink Zamzam water in the sacred city of Makkah:

“O God (through my drinking of this water) grant me knowledge that is

beneficial, abundant sustenance, and healing from all illnesses.”

In this way, every time we drink water, we nourish our bodies and our souls with the consciousness of the source of life.

In commemoration of World Water Day let us all resolve to restore the balance (mizan) in our lifestyles and re-commit ourselves to live in reverence and harmony with nature. And above all, let us take active steps to conserve water.



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