

ISLAMIC SACRED TEXTS RELATED TO WATER

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Water, its purposes, usages and the principles of water conservation, are contained throughout Islam's teachings as found in its primary source texts: the *Holy Qur'an* (which Muslims hold to be the uncreated spoken word of God) and the *Sunnah* (Divinely guided sayings and doings of the Prophet *Muhammed* – SAAWS - Peace Be Upon Him) which are both considered as legally binding precedents on the believers.

Water is a major theme in Islamic cosmology and iconography as well as a recurrent topic in liturgy and daily life. Each of the *An-biyyah* (Prophets) and *Rasool* (Messengers) mentioned in the *Qur'an* from Adam to *Muhammed* (Peace Be Upon them all) including *Nuh* (Noah), *Ibrahim* (Abraham), *Musa* (Moses) and *Isa* (Jesus) has an intimate story connected with water. This is not surprising since Islam and its antecedents originated in and around the Arabian peninsula, a desert area, and it spread mainly to other arid or semi-arid territories. Scarcity has always influenced and continues to influence the perception of water by Muslims and it has, accordingly, shaped (and continues to shape) their behaviors and customs.

Given this reality coupled with the fact that in general religion and religious teachings still exert significant influence on Muslims and Muslim society, developing religion-based awareness campaigns and effective water conservation and management programs, is a critical component in strategies to develop effective policies and campaigns for the conservation of water resources. *Imams*, religious leaders, educators, *Khateeb*s (Friday Preachers), environmental activists and other opinion makers need to become conversant and trained to convey messages of water appreciation and conservation.

References to water appear numerous times in the *Qur'an*. Islam ascribes the most sacred qualities to water as a life-giving, sustaining and purifying resource. The Arabic word for water, "*ma'aa*," appears not less than sixty times throughout the *Qur'an*. In addition, water is frequently referenced through mention of rivers, seas, fountains, springs, rain, hail, clouds and winds, etc. as signs and evidence of Allah's Benevolence and Mercy.

What follows on both the symbolic and practical level is a selection of some of those important Islamic texts that mention water.

From the *Qur'an*

Water as the primary and primordial element

“And it is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days,
and his Throne was upon water, that He might try you...”

Surah Hud (Hood) 11:7

Water as the origin of every living thing, by Divine intervention

“...We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?”

Surah Al-Anbiyyah (the Prophets) 21:30

“And it is He who created humans from water, and has appointed for him kindred by blood, and kindred by marriage. And your Lord is Ever All-Powerful to do what He wills”.

Surah al-Furqan (The Criterion) 25:54

“Allah has created every moving (living) creature from water. Of them there are some that creep on their bellies, and some that walk on two legs, and some that walk on four. Allah creates what He wills. Verily Allah is Able to do all things”.

Surah an-Noor (The Light) 24:45

Water’s life-giving quality

“And Allah has sent down the water from the sky and therewith gives life to the earth after its death...”

Surah an-Nahl (The Bees) 16:65

“Say: if your stream be some morning lost, who then can supply you with clear flowing water?”

Surah al-Mulk (The Dominion) 67:30

“And it is He who sends forth the winds as heralds of glad tidings, going before His saving Mercy (Rain) and We send down pure water from the sky...”

Surah al-Furqan (The Criterion) 25:48

“In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, and the ships that run in the sea with that which benefits mankind, and the water that Allah sends down from the sky, then gives life with it to the earth after its death and spreads in it all (kinds of) animals, and the changing of the winds and the clouds made subservient between heaven and earth, there are surely signs for a people who understand.”

Surah al-Baqara (The Cow) 2:164

Water as a gift and, like Divine Revelation (Wahy), descends in steps from the Heavens:

“...Or Who has created the Heavens and the Earth, and Who sends you down water from the sky? Yea, with it We cause to grow well-planted orchards full of beauty of delight: it is not in your power to cause the growth of the trees in them? Can there be another god besides Allah? ...”

Surah an-Namal (The Ants) 27:60

“God is the One Who has created Heaven and Earth, and sends down water from the sky. He brings forth produce by means of it as sustenance for you. He has subjected ships to you so they may sail at sea by His command; and subjected rivers to you”.

Surah Ibrahim (Abraham) 14:32

Water is scarce and should not be wasted

“...And we send water from the sky in fixed measure...”

Surah Ghafir (The Forgiver) 40:13

O Children of Adam!... Eat and drink: But waste not by excess, for God loveth not the wasters.”

Surah al-Araaf (The Heights) 7:31

“And We send down water from the sky according to [due] measure and We cause it to soak in the soil; and We certainly are able to drain it off”.

Surah al-Mu'minoon (The Believers) 23:18

God can withhold water from the people

“Consider the water which you drink. Was it you that brought it down from the rain clouds or We? If We had willed, We could make it bitter, why then do you not give thanks.”

Surah al-Waqiah (The Event) 56:68-70

Water as a symbol of resurrection

“ And when it is said to those who are the pious, ‘What is it that your Lord has sent down?’ They say: ‘That which is good.’ For those who do good in this world, there is good and the home of the Hereafter will be better. And excellent indeed will be the home of the pious. Eden Paradise (Garden of Eternity) which they will enter, under which rivers flow, they have therein all that they wish. Thus Allah rewards the pious.”

Surah an-Nahl (The Bees) 16:30-31

Water's purifying power

Wudu (ablutions) are a duty to be performed accurately before *Salat* (ritual prayers) in order to reach a state of purity. The *Qur'an* describes in detail the procedure to be followed when performing *wudu*.

Notice the principle of water conservation built into *Qur'anic* language of *wudu* by the change of terms “*fagsilue*” wash (not more than three times as was the Prophetic practice) and to “*masahu*” wipe (a single time).

“...It is He who sends down water upon you from the sky with which to purify you...”

Surah al-Anfal (The Spoils of War) 8:11

“O you who believe! When you prepare for prayer wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe your heads and wash your feet up to the ankles...”

Surah Maidah (The Table spread) 5:6

From the Sunnah

Water as a commons to all humanity

“Humans are co-owners in three things: water, fire, and pastures (and therefore must share them)”

(Muslim)

On conservation of water

When the Prophet saw Sa'd performing *wudu* he said: “What is this? You are wasting water.”

Sa'd replied: “Can there be waste while performing ablution?”

The Prophet replied: “Yes even if you perform it in a flowing river.”

(Musnad of Imam Ahmed)

Water distribution

“Narrated Sahl bin Sad: A glass (full of milk or water) was brought to the Prophet who drank from it, while on his right side there was sitting a boy who was the youngest of those who were present and on his left side there were old men. The Prophet asked, “O boy, will you allow me to give it (i.e. the rest of the drink) to the old men?” The boy said, “O Allah’s Apostle! I will not give preference to anyone over me to drink the rest of it from which you have drunk.” So, the Prophet gave it to him”.

(Bukhari)

“Narrated Az-Zuhri: Anas bin Malik said, that once a domestic sheep was milked for Allah’s Apostle while he was in the house of Anas bin Malik. The milk was mixed with water drawn from the well in Anas’s house. A glass of it was presented to Allah’s Apostle who drank from it. Then Abu Bakr was sitting on his left side and a bedouin on his right side. When the Prophet removed the glass from his mouth, ‘Umar was afraid that the Prophet might give it to the bedouin, so he said. “O Allah’s Apostle! Give it to Abu Bakr who is sitting by your side.” But the Prophet gave it to the bedouin, who was to his right and said, “You should start with the one on your right side.”

(Bukhari)

“Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah’s Apostle said, “Do not withhold the surplus water, for that will prevent people from grazing their cattle.”

(Bukhari)

“Narrated Abu Huraira: that Allah’s Apostle said, “Do not withhold the surplus water in order to withhold the surplus grass.”

(Bukhari)

“Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah’s Apostle said, “There are three persons whom Allah will not look at on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them and theirs shall be a severe punishment. They are:

1. A man who possessed surplus water, on a way and he withheld it from travelers. Allah will say to him, ‘Today I will withhold My Grace from you as you withheld the surplus of what you had not created.’
2. A man who gave a pledge of allegiance to a ruler and he gave it only for worldly benefits. If the ruler gives him something he gets satisfied, and if the ruler withholds something from him, he gets dissatisfied.
3. And man displayed his goods for sale after the ‘Asr prayer and he said, ‘By Allah, except Whom None has the right to be worshipped, I have been given so much for my goods,’ and somebody believes him (and buys them).”

The Prophet then recited: “Verily! Those who purchase a little gain at the cost of Allah’s Covenant and their oaths.”

(Qur’an 3.77) (Bukhari)

“Narrated ‘Abdullah bin Az-Zubair: An Ansari man quarrelled with Az-Zubair in the presence of the Prophet about the Harra Canals which were used for irrigating the date-palms. The Ansari man said to Az-Zubair, “Let the water pass’ but Az-Zubair refused to do so. So, the case was brought before the Prophet who said to Az-Zubair, “O Zubair! Irrigate (your land) and then let the water pass to your neighbor.” On that the Ansari got angry and said to the

Prophet, “Is it because he (i.e. Zubair) is your aunt’s son?” On that the color of the face of Allah’s Apostle changed (because of anger) and he said, “O Zubair! Irrigate (your land) and then withhold the water till it reaches the walls between the pits round the trees (i.e. let the water go to the other’s land).”.” Zubair said, “By Allah, I think that the following verse was revealed on this occasion”: “But no, by your Lord They can have No faith Until they make you judge In all disputes between them.”

(Qur’an 4.65) (Bukhari)

“Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah’s Apostle said, “While a man was walking he felt thirsty and went down a well and drank water from it. On coming out of it, he saw a dog panting and eating mud because of excessive thirst. The man said, ‘This (dog) is suffering from the same problem as that of mine. So he (went down the well), filled his shoe with water, caught hold of it with his teeth and climbed up and watered the dog. Allah thanked him for his (good) deed and forgave him.’ The people asked, “O Allah’s Apostle! Is there a reward for us in serving (the) animals?” He replied, “Yes, there is a reward for serving any living creature”.

(Bukhari)

“Narrated Ibn ‘Abbas: The Prophet said, “May Allah be merciful to Hajr the mother of Ishmael! If she had left the water of Zam-Zam (fountain) as it was, (without constructing a basin for keeping the water-reservoir), (or said, “If she had not taken handfuls of its water”), it would have been a flowing stream. Jurhum (an Arab tribe) came and asked her, ‘May we settle at your dwelling?’ She said, ‘Yes, but you have no right to possess the water.’ They agreed.”

(Bukhari)

Water and the word origin of *Shariah*

The linguistic meaning and etymological roots of the word “*Shariah*” (Sacred Law) actually means “the watering source” or “the path that leads down to a source of water” with the intent to show that Divine law will quench the thirst of knowledge and that it is the path leading to the source of truth.

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