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## Islamic Iktisad (Frugality) Solution to Consumerism as the Root Cause of Environmental Destruction

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# ISLAMIC *IKTISAD* (FRUGALITY): SOLUTION TO CONSUMERISM AS THE ROOT CAUSE OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION

Heather Fagan \*

**Abstract:** Although consumerism has long been recognised as one of the major contributors of environmental destruction, little change in consumer habits have resulted. Knowledge alone of the widespread environmental destruction caused by consumeristic lifestyles simply has not provided the required motivation for behavioural change. Religions have a key role to play, as they have the potential to provide this motivation needed for change. One concept largely absent from religious environmental ethics literature is *iktisad*, the Islamic concept of frugality, which has the potential to produce this required change in consumeristic behaviour. *Iktisad* is using only resources that are necessary – no more, no less. Importantly, though, Islamic environmental *iktisad* is also an important means of spiritual and personal development, which provides added motivation for change without the necessity of a separate environmental consciousness. It is a means of detachment from material goods, allowing for increased contentment, gratitude and enhanced personal relationships. While the motivation for Muslims to implement *iktisad* may be religious, the personal benefits of *iktisad* mean it can appeal to all human beings, regardless of religious belief. These motivating factors of *iktisad*, mean it offers a real, lasting and urgently needed solution to environmental destruction caused by consumerism.

**Keywords:** *Islam, iktisad, environment, spirituality, frugality*

## INTRODUCTION

Although consumerism has long been recognised as one of the major contributors of environmental destruction, little change in consumer habits have resulted. Knowledge alone of the fact that consumeristic lifestyles are causing widespread environmental destruction simply has not provided the required motivation for behavioural change. Religions, therefore, have a key role to play, as they have the potential to provide the motivation needed for change. Although scholars from various religions have developed religious-based environmental ethics, there is one concept largely absent from religious environmental ethics literature. *Iktisad*, the Islamic concept of frugality, has the potential to produce this required change in consumeristic behaviour. While it is promoted in non-environmental areas of the life of a Muslim, it has not

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yet been examined in detail from an environmental perspective. Not only does it offer a solution to consumerism, a key benefit of *iktisad* is that it can be implemented without the need to adopt a separate environmental consciousness. This provides the motivation for the long-lasting change that is required to counter consumerism that mainstream environmental ethics have failed to implement. The personal benefits that result from implementing *iktisad* mean it can also appeal to the broader society, and therefore is not limited to practising Muslims. This provides a great opportunity for significant environmental change that is urgently needed.

Education in the role of consumerism in environmental destruction, although widely recognised, simply has not produced significant changes in consumer behaviour. Research proves that individuals continue to consume high levels of resources and live unsustainably, demonstrating the failure of the environmental movement to deliver substantial behavioural changes in consumers.<sup>1</sup> The per capita consumption of energy, meat and lumber has, in fact, doubled since 1950; the use of plastic has increased five times; aluminium use has increased seven times, and the average airplane kilometres per person has jumped 33 times.<sup>2</sup>

Identifying a solution begins with understanding the motivation behind consumer behaviour to determine why education alone does not produce change. Consumerism thrives on the desires of individuals, appealing to people to think that the more products they consume the better they will feel.<sup>3</sup> It turns healthy desires into greed, with people buying products to feel better about themselves and to find solace in material goods.<sup>4</sup> ‘Shopaholism’ has even become a recognised disease, where people shop to escape suffering in the same way they consume drugs and alcohol.<sup>5</sup> Loy states, since consumption is the driving motivation among some people above anything else, it may have even become the new world religion.<sup>6</sup> The concept of spending wisely is rare, with consumers also obtaining satisfaction simply from purchasing goods on sale, regardless of their necessity. For companies, the motivation is profit, which means acting ethically is a challenge.<sup>7</sup> Simply having the knowledge that their actions gravely harm future descendants and people across the globe has not proved to be enough for consumers and companies to change.<sup>8</sup> Without a strong motivation to change, therefore, the consumer lifestyle that is already firmly established remains.

Religions, therefore, have a key role to play in environmental ethics as they are able to address the cause of consumerism, which is desires. Religions have been proven to implement fairness in markets, which acts completely in the opposite way to the capitalist notion of

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<sup>1</sup> William Kilbourne and Gregory Pickett, “How Materialism Affects Environmental Beliefs, Concern and Environmentally Responsible Behavior,” *Journal of Business Research* 61 (2007): 885. Wesley Schultz, “Conservation Means Behaviour,” *Conservation Biology* 25 (2011): 1080.

<sup>2</sup> Stephanie Kaza, “Overcoming the Grip of Consumerism,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 20 (2000): 23.

<sup>3</sup> Holmes Rolston III, *A New Environmental Ethics: The Next Millennium for Life on Earth* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 198.

<sup>4</sup> Rolston, *A New Environmental Ethics*, 198.

<sup>5</sup> Kaza, “Overcoming Consumerism,” 28.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> Rolston, *A New Environmental Ethics*, 37.

markets being driven by self-interest.<sup>9</sup> Since motivation in religions is generally not only for self-interest, it demonstrates a real potential for motivation for change.

While religious scholars have developed environmental ethics specific to their faith, none of them address the concept of *iktisad*. Christian and Jewish scholars re-translated the Biblical term ‘dominion’ of the natural environment in Genesis to mean human beings are stewards of the natural environment, so must maintain and care for the natural environment.<sup>10</sup> Buddhist environmental ethics argues that consumerism leads to enslavement to the desires of consumer goods, preventing people from attaining peace.<sup>11</sup> The solution, according to Buddhist environmental ethics, is an emphasis on awakening individuals to the desires of consumerism, including the need for belonging, status and happiness.<sup>12</sup> The concept of *iktisad* does not appear in religious environmental ethics, yet has the potential to address these individual desires.

Islamic scholars have examined the approximately 500 verses in the Qur’ān (Islamic holy book) that give guidance on environmental matters.<sup>13</sup> They state the natural environment is God’s creation and human beings are stewards of the earth, commanded to protect all of God’s Creation.<sup>14</sup> The Qur’ān states God created the natural environment in perfect measure and balance, and every species glorifies God.<sup>15</sup> Islamic scholars have also examined the *sunnah* (actions and words of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)),<sup>16</sup> providing numerous examples of his environmental sustainability.

While numerous Islamic scholars have discussed environmental Qur’ānic verses and *hādīth* outlining environmental principles and actions,<sup>17</sup> absent from the literature is a discussion about Islamic *iktisad* (wise consumption of resources, frugality), with the exception of Yucel.<sup>18</sup> His connection between *iktisad* and environmental ethics, while only four paragraphs, discusses the relationship between frugality and current environmental concerns. His initial discussion will be developed to provide a more detailed analysis of the role frugality can play in environmental protection.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 198.

<sup>10</sup> Robin Attfield, *Environmental Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 34-36.

<sup>11</sup> Kaza, “Overcoming Consumerism,” 34.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Hafiz Masri, “Islam and Ecology,” in *Islam and Ecology*, ed. Fazlun Khalid and Joanne O’Brien (London: Cassell Publishers Ltd, 1997), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Nomanul Haq, “Islam and Ecology: Toward Retrieval and Reconstruction,” *Islam and Ecology*, ed. Richard Foltz et al. (Massachusetts: The President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2003), 127.

<sup>15</sup> Abubakr Bagader, Abdullatif El-Sabbagh, Mohamad Al-Glayand, and Mawwil Samarrai, “Environmental Protection in Islam,” *IslamReligion.com*, last modified October 16, 2011, <http://www.isamreligion.com/articles/307/viewall>.

<sup>16</sup> Peace be upon him is said by Muslims when referring to messengers of God as a sign of respect.

<sup>17</sup> Mawil Izzi Dien, *The Environmental Dimensions of Islam* (England: The Lutterworth Press, 2000). Haq, “Islam and Ecology.” Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> Salih Yucel, “Said Nursi’s Approach to the Environment: A Spiritual View on the Book of the Universe,” *The Islamic Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2011): 9-10, 13.

## ***IKTISAD***

*Iktisad* is an Islamic concept that offers a real solution to consumerism by providing meaningful motivation and the wisdom necessary for human beings to reduce consumption. *Iktisad* incorporates the meaning of frugality;<sup>19</sup> however, this definition is not completely accurate as it includes being economical and spending exactly as much as necessary, no more and no less.<sup>20</sup> It also means to act in accordance with the aim/intention for which something was created, as it is derived from the root word *kasd* in Arabic, which means to aim or intend.<sup>21</sup> Due to *iktisad* incorporating all these definitions, the Arabic will be used to avoid simplifying the meaning to frugality.

Usually referring to the consumption of food and drink, the practice of *iktisad* in Islam involves recognition that wastefulness leads to greed, causing dissatisfaction and complaints, rather than offering thanks.<sup>22</sup> A wasteful person often complains, yet even the poorest person who is content will only offer thanks.<sup>23</sup> *Iktisad*, on the other hand, is a means of gratitude through proper consumption of God's blessings.

*Iktisad* does not mean going without or harming oneself, living on the bare minimum, or not seeking pleasure. In fact, seeking pleasure for the sake of offering thanks is encouraged, so long as it is in accordance with *iktisad*.<sup>24</sup> Pleasure and thanks are increased through *iktisad* as waste and extravagance lead a person to complain and become complacent about blessings.

Environmental *iktisad*, therefore, means utilisation of natural resources without wasteful, excessive or extravagant consumption. It means appreciating the blessings of each resource and consuming wisely. It does not mean human beings should not consume resources nor does it mean going without. Incorporating Islam's principle of moderation, it means using natural resources within the permissible sphere, which results in spiritual development, through gratitude, enhanced pleasure through understanding of God and closeness to God. These concepts will be explored by considering the categories of environmental *iktisad* taken from Muhit Mert's<sup>25</sup> application of *iktisad* to economics in his article *İslâm İktisat Düşünce Üzerine* (Upon the *Iktisad* Thought in Islam). Three of the six categories used by Mert will be considered, with the addition of one category not used by Mert, the spiritual dimension of *iktisad*. The four categories discussed are:

1. Religion's perspective of the human being
2. Human-goods balance
3. Balance between community and individuals

<sup>19</sup> Said Nursi, *The Flashes Collection* (Istanbul: Sözlür Publications, 2004), 189.

<sup>20</sup> Mehmet Abidin Kartal, "İktisat Penceresinden Kâinata ve İnsana Bakışı" [Human and Universe in Terms of Economics], Köprü, last modified Spring, 2009, <http://www.koprudergisi.com/index.asp?Bolum=EskiSayilar&Goster=Yazi&YaziNo=989>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Nursi, *The Flashes Collection*, 191, 196.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 194.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 195.

<sup>25</sup> Muhit Mert, "İslam İktisat Düşüncesi Üzerine" [Upon the *Iktisad* Thought in Islam], Yeni Umit, last modified 2010, <http://www.yeniyumit.com.tr/paylasim/yazdir/islam-iktisat-dusuncesi-uzerine>.

#### 4. Spiritual dimensions of *iktisad*.

This will demonstrate how *iktisad* not only offers a solution to global environmental destruction, but also provides strong motivation for human beings to protect the natural environment, which is a major concern in environmental ethics.

### THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE HUMAN BEING

The basis of Islam is God's Unity and Oneness (*tawhid*), which affects every component of Islam, including environmental ethics and *iktisad*. Belief in His Unity and Oneness leads to a contrasting perspective of the human being from the view of consumerism, which will be discussed, identifying ways *iktisad* can provide motivation for protection of the environment. In Islamic *iktisad*, God's Unity and Oneness means that God is the Owner and Creator of everything in the universe, including the human being, which is part of this interdependent universe: "To God belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth."<sup>26</sup> In capitalism, on the other hand, human beings are viewed as units of production and consumption.<sup>27</sup> Natural resources are not viewed as an interdependent component of the universe, but as resources to be extracted.<sup>28</sup> This perspective has meant human beings have become disconnected from the natural environment.<sup>29</sup> Islamic *iktisad*, however, acknowledges that human beings are an interdependent component of God's Creation, which necessitates a fundamental starting point for conserving natural resources and provides motivation to protect natural resources as they are viewed as belonging to God, not to human beings.

Recognition of God's *tawhid* means God has created the universe in perfect balance that should not be altered by human beings. "Verily, all things have We created in proportion and measure."<sup>30</sup> God tells human beings not to disturb this balance: "And the sky has He raised high, and has devised (for all things) a balance, so that you might never transgress the balance: weigh, therefore (your deeds) with equity, and do not upset the balance."<sup>31</sup> These verses demonstrate that everything in the universe was created to operate with unified purpose and each element is critical to maintain the balance and functioning of the universe. This perfect balance is demonstrated by the destruction caused as a result of the population decrease by a single species in an ecosystem. In Yellowstone National Park, for example, the reintroduction of wolves after they were removed due to hunting restored the balance of plant, animal and fish species, as well as the natural flow of rivers.<sup>32</sup> The hunting of whales has led to the discovery

<sup>26</sup> Qur'ān, 4:126. Throughout this paper, Y. Ali's translation of the Qur'ān will be used unless otherwise stated.

<sup>27</sup> Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen*, 36.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>30</sup> Qur'ān, 54:49.

<sup>31</sup> Qur'ān, 55:7-9.

<sup>32</sup> "How Reintroducing Wolves Helped Save a Famous Park," BBC, last modified January 28, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20140128-how-wolves-saved-a-famous-park>. "How Wolves Change Rivers," Sustainable Human, last modified February 13, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysa5OBhXz-Q>.

that, while whales eat fish, the reduction in whale numbers also led to reduction in fish species, since whales cause the photosynthesis of the plants that fish eat.<sup>33</sup> Not only do whales keep fish alive, they also reduce climate change through the absorption of carbon dioxide in plant species they bring to the surface of the water.<sup>34</sup> The balance of Creation is so detailed that the reproduction rate of a species changes according to its lifespan; species with higher reproduction rates have shorter lifespans and vice-versa meaning balance is maintained.<sup>35</sup> This perfect balance can also be seen from the Earth's ability to clean itself. Despite the amount of waste produced from animals, as well as the deaths of species, the Earth has the ability to clean itself, to the point that this death and waste is not even visible.<sup>36</sup> Islamic *iktisad*, therefore, means, by consuming thriftily, human beings conserve God's balance and also appreciate this balance.<sup>37</sup>

The third perspective of the human being is that God has assigned human beings the role of God's stewards and representatives. God says in the Qur'ān, "Behold your Lord said to the angels: 'I will create a vicegerent (*caliph*) on earth.'"<sup>38</sup> Definitions of *caliph* also include successor, guardian, steward, viceroy and trustee.<sup>39</sup> As stewards of God's Creation, He gave human beings a trust: "Truly We did offer the trust to the heavens and earth, and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and were afraid of it. But the man bore it."<sup>40</sup> This verse means human beings are entrusted to look after God's Creation, protect it, maintain it and ensure equal access to it.<sup>41</sup> It describes that this responsibility is so great that others (such as the mountains, heavens and earth) shrank away from the responsibility.<sup>42</sup> As God's deputy, steward and trustee, Islamic *iktisad* means human beings feel honoured to consume wisely, knowing it maintains the universe that belongs to God in the perfect balance it was created, just as people protect the belongings of an employer, friend or anyone whose goods are entrusted to them. Knowing that God assigned human beings the role of *caliph* and entrusted the universe to us provides motivation beyond worldly means for consuming wisely.

Islamic *iktisad* recognises that individuals have free-will and choice, that they are not completely free, but have responsibilities and are accountable for their actions. Since Muslims believe actions are rewarded and punished in this world and in the hereafter, there are almost no incidents involving human beings that do not contain responsibility and accountability.<sup>43</sup> As *caliphs*, human beings are responsible for the natural environment and will be accountable for

<sup>33</sup> "How Whales Change Climate," Sustainable Human, last modified November 30, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M18HxXve3CM>.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Muhammad Ramzan Akhtar, "Towards an Islamic Approach for Environmental Balance," *Islamic Economic Studies* 3, no.2 (1996): 61.

<sup>36</sup> Yucel, *Nursi's Holistic Environmental Approach*, 12.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Qur'ān, 2:30.

<sup>39</sup> Ali Mohamed Al-Damkhi, "Environmental Ethics in Islam: Principles, Violations and Future Perspectives," *International Journal of Environmental Studies* 65, no. 1 (2008), 17.

<sup>40</sup> Qur'ān, 33:72.

<sup>41</sup> Haq, "Islam and Ecology," 150.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>43</sup> Mert, *Islam Iktisat Dusuncesi Uzerine*.

the neglect or protection of God's Creation.<sup>44</sup> It also shows human beings have the choice and responsibility as stewards, since God sees how we acquit ourselves. Muslims further believe any transgression or disobedience of God's guidance is detrimental the individual: "Whoever transgresses the bounds of God has done wrong but to himself."<sup>45</sup> As human beings rely on nature, the destruction of ecosystems and species also harms human beings as the balance is disturbed.<sup>46</sup> *Iktisad* provides a means of limiting consumption to within balance and necessity.

Capitalism and Islamic *iktisad* recognise that humans are inclined to many desires, one of which is greed. As seen above, this is evident through consumerism, as human beings are continually purchasing more and more products, for which they often have little or no use.<sup>47</sup> Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said "If the son of Adam has two valleys filled with wealth, he will demand a third, but nothing fills the stomach of the son of Adam like dust".<sup>48</sup> This *hādith* demonstrates that human beings' desires are never satisfied, constantly seeking more. Islamic *iktisad* provides a solution for this inclination towards greed in training these desires by consuming less through proper use of resources, which leads to contentment through appreciation of the resources used and products consumed. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said "wealth is not a lot of goods but it is being satisfied with what one has."<sup>49</sup> This seeking of worldly pleasures is how consumerism thrives and is the opposite of *iktisad*. Since it is not possible to satisfy all human desires, it can cause devastation, anguish and even aggression to obtain more.<sup>50</sup> A person who consumes excessive amounts, desires more and more, never obtains contentment. Yet Islamic *iktisad* allows a person who uses resources wisely to find true contentment and pleasure from the smallest of objects.

The perspective of the human being in Islamic *iktisad* is very different to the view of the individual in capitalism. In capitalism, the human being is seen to have unlimited willpower and freedom of choice, with the ability to undertake everything they desire.<sup>51</sup> The Islamic view is that human beings are accountable for their actions and recognises that greed must be trained, as human beings will never be satisfied with wealth and material items. On the contrary, contentment is not obtained through material possession, but through satisfaction of heart and mind. Instead of consuming more, contentment actually occurs through possessing less, but being grateful for all owned as it is viewed as blessings. Being satisfied with less means less demand on the natural environment to be turned into consumable products, since fewer goods will need to be produced. This view of the human being in Islamic *iktisad* motivates human beings to consume less and hence protect the natural environment, which is an important contribution to environmental ethics.

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<sup>44</sup> Yucel, "Nursi's Approach to the Environment," 15.

<sup>45</sup> Qur'ān, 65:1

<sup>46</sup> Haq, "Islam and Ecology," 157.

<sup>47</sup> Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen*, 30.

<sup>48</sup> Bukhari, 444.

<sup>49</sup> Bukhari, 453.

<sup>50</sup> Mert, "Islam Ikitsat Dusuncesi Uzerine."

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

## HUMAN-GOODS BALANCE

In all matters, Islam provides a measure for what is *halal* (permissible) and what is *haram* (unlawful).<sup>52</sup> This section examines the guidelines for establishing this balance in regards to the use of natural resources. Importantly, Islam recognises that human desires and wants can be fulfilled within a permitted sphere and does not promote extreme lifestyles, such as living without consumption or pleasure. Islam seeks the middle ground and is to be followed by the majority of society, not only the religious elite or clergy. Islamic *iktisad* recognises that human beings have been given natural resources by God for use; however, consumption of these resources should be conducted wisely.

Islam enables the human being to benefit from property in a satisfactory and permitted sphere, recognising they have certain desires in relation to consumption.<sup>53</sup> It provides a measure of *halal* and *haram*, allowing human beings to benefit from property, while also saving them from the ambition and agony of focusing on the temporariness of this world.<sup>54</sup> Islamic environmental *iktisad* means recognition that utilisation of natural resources is permitted; however, excessive use is prohibited, as wastefulness is condemned. The Qur'ān clearly states resources are to be used by human beings: "And He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on earth: behold in that indeed there are signs for those who reflect."<sup>55</sup> While permitting human beings to use natural resources, this verse does not justify domination or over-use of resources, but means enjoying items in the universe so long as adherence to the laws that govern them is maintained.<sup>56</sup> These laws include maintaining the balance created by God and living without excess or extravagance. It is interesting to note that classical scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) commented on the verses of the Qur'ān that describe the universe as being subjected to human use saying, "It must be remembered that God in His wisdom brought into being creatures for reasons other than serving human beings. In these verses God only explains the human benefits of these".<sup>57</sup> It is significant that Ibn Taymiyya wrote this commentary centuries prior to today's environmental concern. Humanity is one of millions of species, which all have rights on earth.<sup>58</sup> Wise consumption of natural resources, therefore, is within this permitted sphere of Islamic *iktisad*, without waste and excess.

While implementing Islamic *iktisad* means valuing and appreciating what a person has, it means avoiding waste. The Qur'ān clearly prohibits waste of any kind. The following verse appears twice in the Qur'ān, highlighting its importance: "But waste not by excess, for God loves not the wasteful."<sup>59</sup> The Qur'ān also says, "Verily, spendthrifts are brothers of the Evil Ones; and the Evil One is to his Lord (Himself) ungrateful."<sup>60</sup> Islam, therefore, does not

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Qur'ān, 45:13.

<sup>56</sup> Naci Kula, "The Principles of Relationship Between Human and the Environment in the Qur'ān," *Hiti Uiversitesi Ilhayat Fakultesi Dergisi* 10, no. 20 (2001).

<sup>57</sup> Haq, "Islam and Ecology," 154.

<sup>58</sup> Fazlun Khalid and Joanne O'Brien, *Islam and Ecology* (London: Cassell Publishers Ltd, 1992), 20.

<sup>59</sup> Qur'ān, 6:141; Qur'ān, 7:31.

<sup>60</sup> Qur'ān, 17:27.

approve of a lavish or unjust consumption of resources, wastefulness and extravagance.<sup>61</sup> Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said water should not be wasted when making ablution “even if you are by a flowing river.”<sup>62</sup> This restriction demonstrates the importance of *iktisad*, since the restriction is not to waste water even when it is plentiful.<sup>63</sup> This avoidance of waste, from an environmental perspective, involves a reduction in the use of natural resources, for goods such as disposable packaging, fossil fuel use and water. This prohibition of waste therefore means recycling is an important component of *iktisad*, since it reduces waste by preventing goods from being disposed of in landfill. Not only does recycling reduce the waste material produced, it also reduces the demand for natural resources.<sup>64</sup> Environmental *iktisad* therefore means avoiding waste, without the necessity for a separate environmental consciousness for practising Muslims as it is clearly established in the Qur’ān.

A further examination of the use of water in Islam demonstrates the balance in *iktisad* between the use of resources and waste or excess and the necessity of gratitude. Use of water by human beings is a necessity, as it is the source of life; “We made from water every living thing.”<sup>65</sup> The Qur’ān tells human beings that water is for their use, yet they must give thanks for receiving the blessings, “Have you seen the water which you drink? Was it you who sent it down from the raincloud or did We send it? Were it Our will, We could have made it bitter; why then do you not give thanks?”<sup>66</sup> Not only does water sustain life, it is also a necessity in Islam for cleanliness and spiritual purification. When a person accepts Islam, they clean their entire body with pure water.<sup>67</sup> Ablution before prayer and the Islamic pilgrimage is also essential in Islam; however, its necessity does not permit wasting of water, as previously mentioned, since excessive use of water should not occur, even if beside a flowing river. Human beings are therefore required to use water to perform *wudu*, yet not go into excess through over-use of or wasting water. Given this sensitivity to wasting water is required in acts of worship, one can draw the analogy that Islam requires *iktisad* in other acts, such as taking shorter showers, turning water off during washing up or brushing teeth<sup>68</sup> and watering the garden during cooler periods of the day. Wasting water, on the other hand, demonstrates ingratitude for these blessings and is disrespectful to the blessing of water, since a person could be among the nearly two-thirds of people who are unable to attain fresh drinking water<sup>69</sup> or the 3.6 million people that die each year from water-related diseases.<sup>70</sup> Practising *iktisad*, on the other hand, involves more than consuming wisely, but also involves acknowledgement and

<sup>61</sup> Mohammad Aslam Parvaiz, “Environmental Ethics – The Human Role as Advocated by the Qur’ān and Elucidated by Ustad Nursi,” Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, accessed August 11, 2012, <http://www.bediuzzaman-saidnursi.org/en/icerik/environmental-ethics-human-role-advocated-quran-and-elucidated-ustad-nursi>.

<sup>62</sup> Ibn Majah, 419.

<sup>63</sup> Dien, *Environmental Dimensions of Islam*, 32.

<sup>64</sup> Akhtar, “Towards an Environmental Approach,” 59.

<sup>65</sup> Qur’ān, 21:30.

<sup>66</sup> Qur’ān, 56:78-70.

<sup>67</sup> Dien, *Environmental Dimensions of Islam*, 30.

<sup>68</sup> Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen*, 135, 136, 140.

<sup>69</sup> Abubaker Bagader, et al. “Environmental Protection in Islam,” *The Religion of Islam*, last modified April 10, 2016, <http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/307/viewall/environmental-protection-in-islam/>.

<sup>70</sup> Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen*, 120.

gratitude for the blessing of clean water and all resources. The use of water demonstrates that *iktisad* involves the use of natural resources by human beings within a balance of necessity and waste.

The requirement not to waste water by a flowing river for an obligatory act of worship also demonstrates that the scarcity or abundance of resources does not determine actions. Rather, the importance lies in establishing behavioural patterns and character, being consistent in *iktisad* regardless of the circumstances. This means a rich person does not need to spend excessively, rather being content with necessities and establishing a behavioural pattern of *iktisad*. This goes against the consumeristic principle of spending as much as a person has, if not more. Furthermore, decreased spending and consumption can also lead to increased gratitude and hence contentment, as a person is reminded of each blessing and satisfied with less, which will be discussed further below.

The practice of environmental *iktisad* involves the consumption of goods needed, in contrast to the excessive consumption that currently occurs in consumerism. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) consumed material possessions in balance, accordance with needs. He said, “The worldly comforts are not for me. I am like a traveller, who takes a rest under a tree in the shade and then goes on his way.”<sup>71</sup> He also mended his clothes and repaired his shoes,<sup>72</sup> not wasting God’s resources and therefore implementing the modern campaign “Reduce, Re-use, Recycle.” When he died, he left neither money nor anything else except his white riding mule, his arms and a piece of land that he left to charity.<sup>73</sup> Practising *iktisad*, however, does not mean human beings should be without items or not take pride in their appearance. God likes to see human beings appreciate the bounties given to them, “Allah loves to see His gifts on His servant”.<sup>74</sup> This means Muslims should present themselves well, wear nice clothes, purchase beautiful clothes if they can afford and appreciate God’s blessings, as long as it is not to excess.<sup>75</sup> Islamic *iktisad*, therefore, while encouraging limited resource use, does not mean Muslims should go into an excessive lifestyle, but appreciate the blessings given by God, as seen in the next paragraph.

While *iktisad* involves use of resources wisely and prohibits waste, moderation must be maintained. *Iktisad* does not mean human beings cannot receive pleasure from material possessions, nor that they should not use natural resources as this is going into excess. Practising *iktisad* involves appreciating and giving thanks for blessings received; therefore, it does not mean living a life of extreme simplicity. It is compulsory for human beings to eat, drink and take protection against the heat and cold so they do not harm themselves nor make it

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<sup>71</sup> Tirmidhi, 5188.

<sup>72</sup> Bukhari, 676.

<sup>73</sup> Bukhari, 4739.

<sup>74</sup> Tirmidhi, 4/206.

<sup>75</sup> “The Muslim Woman and Her Ownself,” Mission Islam, accessed April 22, 2016, <http://www.missionislam.com/family/mwomanownself.htm>.

difficult to worship or attain knowledge.<sup>76</sup> Islam teaches moderation in all aspects of life.<sup>77</sup> “And we have willed you to be a community of the middle path.”<sup>78</sup> Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, “Practise moderation, and if you can’t practise it perfectly, then strive towards it as far as possible”<sup>79</sup>. Prophet Muhamamd (pbuh) also said, “Allah loves to see the signs of His gifts on His servant”.<sup>80</sup> Human beings, therefore, should wear nice clothes to represent themselves well and appreciate the blessings of God, without going into excess. Moderation in our consumption of natural resources allows preservation of the balance and order created by God and is instructed by God and demonstrates how *iktisad* involves a balance of resource use and preventing waste.

It is important to note, although *iktisad* prohibits waste and excess, work and business are essential components of life and are strongly encouraged. Even becoming rich does not contradict *iktisad*, as business is a means of sustenance, charity and fulfilment of a spiritual purpose. Actions such as working for the attainment of sustenance and eating and drinking for the continuation of life can become activities that provide one with reward in the hereafter as “actions are based on intentions”.<sup>81</sup> Islam induces every Muslim to work hard, only discouraging squandering income in luxury goods.<sup>82</sup> When Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was asked whether wealth was good, he replied it was, but it is not always good, giving an example of an animal that eats incessantly and dies from overeating.<sup>83</sup> This demonstrates the balance desired in Islam, as wealth and business are not evil, but are good, as long as they are conducted in a balanced, honest way. The human being who practises *iktisad*, therefore, will engage in business, obtain wealth, yet be content, not seeking more wealth until “choke(ing) with its own greed like the animal that is never satisfied.”<sup>84</sup> *Iktisad*, therefore, does not mean going without, earning a living is a necessity and economic prosperity should be sought, so long as excess and waste do not occur and the intention is not to fulfil selfish desires.

## BALANCE BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUALS

The third aspect of *iktisad* involves a balance between communal and individual needs. Communal needs are placed above the needs of the individual in Islam, which is particularly relevant to environmental *iktisad*. It relates to people living in distant lands, as well as future generations and non-human communities.

<sup>76</sup> Mert, *Islam Ikitsat Dusuncesi Uzerine*.

<sup>77</sup> Nawal Ammar, “An Islamic Response to the Manifest Ecological Crisis,” *The Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger Gottlieb (NY: Routledge, 2004), 378.

<sup>78</sup> Qur’ān, 2:143 in Al-Damkhi, “Environmental Ethics in Islam,” 17.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>80</sup> Tirmidhi 4/206.

<sup>81</sup> Mert, *Islam Ikitsat Dusuncesi Uzerine*.

<sup>82</sup> Akhtar, “Towards an Islamic Approach,” 66.

<sup>83</sup> Dien, *Environmental Dimensions of Islam*, 88.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 88.

In Islam, the needs of the community are placed above the needs of the individual.<sup>85</sup> This is contrary to consumerism, which places the individual at the centre,<sup>86</sup> with big monetary rewards for anyone able to produce marketable products.<sup>87</sup> Individuals working for their own interest, however, have brought great destruction socially and environmentally. Since consumer products are generally consumed in countries far from the natural environment on which they depend, the human being's interaction with the natural environment is reduced, as well as the responsibility felt by consumers of the consequences of their consumption.<sup>88</sup> If workers are exploited, for example, or production destroys the rainforest or causes famine, the consumers are unlikely to feel responsible, or even be aware of these problems.<sup>89</sup> Current consumer practices, therefore, are placing social and environmental problems on societies, which are not felt by the consumers.

The implementation of *iktisad*, however, reduces the impact of consumers on society, on the natural environment and ensures the collective good is placed above the individual interest. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, "A true believer does not hurt anyone with his thoughts, words or actions".<sup>90</sup> Unfortunately, the acts of people in developed countries are causing global environmental and social damage through natural resource abuse and pollution. Travelling to low lying islands, such as in the Pacific Islands, shows the extent of this damage, as huge sea walls have been built around houses to hold back the rising sea water. The impacts of rising sea waters are felt by those who have had minimal, if any, contribution to climate change. The implementation of *iktisad* is a means of reducing and may even prevent further damage by people in developed countries to developing countries through balance.

The practice of *iktisad* is also a means of achieving a desired balance between individual and communal needs and rights. In Islam, the mandatory 2.5% of excess wealth given by Muslims to the poor is viewed as the poor's rightful sustenance, not belonging to the person giving the money. Placing the communal good above the individual, however, does not mean that individual desires cannot be attained. A person practising *iktisad* will significantly reduce the impact of their actions on the rights of other human beings and other species, while increasing contentment and satisfaction through consuming less.

Not only does the practice of environmental *iktisad* protect the environment for communities in distant countries, it also protects the environment for the communities of future generations. Natural resources are a joint resource for each generation to use, which means no generation should disrupt the ability of future generations to use it.<sup>91</sup> Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, "If any one deprives an heir of his inheritance, Allah will deprive him of his

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<sup>85</sup> Ammar, "Islamic Response to Ecological Crisis," 378.

<sup>86</sup> Akhtar, "Towards an Islamic Approach," 68.

<sup>87</sup> Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen*, 36.

<sup>88</sup> Attfield, *Environmental Ethics*, 77.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Bukhari, in Khaled and O'Brien, *Islam and Ecology*, 21.

<sup>91</sup> Bagader et al., "Environmental Protection in Islam."

inheritance in Paradise on the Day of Resurrection”.<sup>92</sup> The Qur’ān says, “And you devour the inheritance, all with greed.”<sup>93</sup> The natural environment is inherited by future generations, which provides sustenance. Ali ibn Abu-Talib, the fourth *Caliph* (ruler after Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)) said to a man who had developed and reclaimed deserted land “Partake of it gladly, so long as you are a benefactor, not a despoiler; a cultivator, not a destroyer.”<sup>94</sup> Here is a clear instruction by one of the closest Companions of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to not destroy land, but only improve it. Overexploitation, therefore, abuse, destruction and pollution of the Creation, are all transgressions against God’s Divine scheme.<sup>95</sup> Practising *iktisad*, therefore, ensures minimal impact on future generations, by protecting the balance created by God.

Practising *iktisad* also means maintaining the rights of non-human communities, as it acknowledges natural resources were intended for the use of all species. The Qur’ān says, “There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth, nor a being that flies on its wings, but forms (part of) communities like you ...”<sup>96</sup> This verse compares animal species to human beings, saying each is a community. Recognition that every species is a community means human beings, who were entrusted as God’s stewards must not harm these non-human communities. All species therefore have the right and privilege to use the resources created by God, as “the earth He has assigned to all living creatures.”<sup>97</sup> Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was always conscious of the impact of human beings on animals, saying, “Fear God in your treatment of animals.”<sup>98</sup> While early Muslims considered all the elements of nature as common property of all creatures,<sup>99</sup> this is not the case under consumerism. Practising *iktisad*, however, will mean that without a separate environmental consciousness, the non-human communities will also be preserved.

## SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF *IKTISAD*

In Islam, everything in the universe has a spiritual dimension, alongside its material dimension.<sup>100</sup> The spiritual components of *iktisad* provide important motivation for human beings to consume wisely, protecting the environment and enacting the role of steward. The spiritual dimensions include obeying God’s commands, attaining closeness to God and spiritual development, all of which will be discussed in this section.

The ultimate goal of Islam is to worship God, by obeying His commands. This provides powerful motivation for human beings to implement *iktisad*. Muslims are encouraged to

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<sup>92</sup> Ibn Majah, in Oliver Leaman, “Islam, the Environment and Said Nursi,” *Islam at the Crossroads* ed. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), accessed December 29 2012, <http://www.iikv.org/academy/index.php/sympeng/article/view/999/1794>.

<sup>93</sup> Qur’ān, 89:19.

<sup>94</sup> Al-Damkhi, “Environmental Ethics in Islam,” 14.

<sup>95</sup> Bagader et al., “Environmental Protection in Islam.”

<sup>96</sup> Qur’ān, 6:38.

<sup>97</sup> Qur’ān, 55:10.

<sup>98</sup> Abu Dawud.

<sup>99</sup> Khaled and O’Brien, *Islam and Ecology*, 6.

<sup>100</sup> Nursi, in Yucel, “Nursi’s Approach to the Environment,” 2.

achieve total obedience to God every moment of their lives.<sup>101</sup> They believe that every atom's weight of good and every atom's weight of evil will be weighed in the afterlife.<sup>102</sup> This belief guides a person and motivates a conscious and practicing Muslim in worldly choices.<sup>103</sup> As seen above, human beings are accountable for their treatment of other beings in the universe, including not wasting and consuming natural resources within the limits assigned by God. This provides powerful motivation for environmental protection as the human being seeks to obey and please God, believing they will be accountable for all actions, including enacting the human being's role of steward, use of resources without waste or excess, placing the communal rights above individual rights and protecting the rights of other species. This is in stark contrast with consumerism, where the goal of life is to accumulate wealth and material goods.<sup>104</sup> It is also in contrast with environmental ethics, which seeks to appeal to individual consciences, without providing strong motivation for change, since the impacts of consumerism are felt by distant people and future generations.

The second spiritual dimension of *iktisad* involves enhancing our relationship with God and recognition of the value and importance of everything in the universe, as opposed to capitalism, which views natural resources as valuable only when they can be used for profit. The word *ayat*, (which means signs) is used in the Qur'ān for both Creation and verses of the Qur'ān, which gives them equal status as signs for human beings.<sup>105</sup> This brings an understanding of God to human beings who observe it, by understanding His Attributes through Creation.<sup>106</sup> As mentioned before, the universe is completely clean, despite death and waste products of so many species, which provides reflection to human beings of God's Name *Al-Quddus*, The Cleaner.<sup>107</sup> Recognising that other species praise God, as stated in the Qur'ān, gives them great value beyond their physicality.<sup>108</sup> This is completely different to consumerism, which views natural resources as objects to be changed into something else for profit.<sup>109</sup> Practicing *iktisad*, therefore, becomes a necessity to protect God's Creation who all praise Him.

*Iktisad* also allows greater development of relationships, with God, families, neighbours and all people. At its core, Islam is about developing a relationship with God and all blessings are a means of developing this relationship.<sup>110</sup> This is opposed to consumerism, which develops relationships with consumer goods.<sup>111</sup> Human beings do not need material goods to be relevant or feel good about themselves.<sup>112</sup> Instead, *iktisad* focusses on building a

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<sup>101</sup> Dien, *Environmental Dimensions of Islam*, 12.

<sup>102</sup> Qur'ān, 99:7-8.

<sup>103</sup> Akhtar, *Towards an Islamic Response*, 64.

<sup>104</sup> Hamza Yusuf, *Striving for the Common Good* [Lecture], accessed February 18, 2013 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wVYYpO5QEHL>.

<sup>105</sup> Haq, "Islam and Ecology," 151.

<sup>106</sup> Bagader et al., "Environmental Protection in Islam."

<sup>107</sup> Yucel, "Nursi's Approach to the Environment," 12.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>109</sup> Leaman, "Islam, the Environment and Nursi."

<sup>110</sup> Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen*, 32.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*.

relationship with God and with families, neighbours and anyone.<sup>113</sup> By describing nature as signs of God in the Qur'ān, He is instructing us to reflect on them about ourselves, about God's Unity and Oneness, the manifestations of His Attributes and the connectivity of the universe.<sup>114</sup> The importance of all Creation in pointing to the Divine Creator demonstrates the necessity of preserving it in a balanced way, which can be achieved through *iktisad*. This provides meaningful motivation for human beings to protect the environment, as a means of understanding and developing a closer relationship with God and allows the development of relationships with others, instead of with material possessions.

Avoiding waste is also an important means of spiritual development. This is obtained through appreciation, contentment and pleasure found in limiting resource use within the boundaries set by God. As outlined by Nursi, *iktisad* is valuing and appreciating God's blessings, while waste and excess are contrary to appreciating God's blessings.<sup>115</sup> Disposable goods are not appreciated for the full value of their use and give no recognition of the blessing given by God and the impact caused on other people and species in production. Recognition of this fact allows a person to spiritually develop through appreciation of God's blessings. As seen above, wastefulness leads to greed, dissatisfaction, constant complaining and can cause the sacrifice of self-respect in the pursuit of greed.<sup>116</sup> Contentment from *iktisad*, however, prevents complaints and promotes thanks, which ensures self-respect through independence and sincerity.<sup>117</sup> Not only does the responsible consumer practising *iktisad* protect the environment from destruction, it is an acknowledgement of blessings received and increases contentment and pleasure. This allows human beings to detach themselves from material possessions and hence increase in development. *Iktisad*, therefore, not only reduces the impact of human beings on the natural environment, it is also a means of spiritual and personal development through acknowledgement of blessings.

The importance of these spiritual dimensions is that, apart from those described above, these benefits provide real motivation, not only for practising Muslims, but also for all people, to implement *iktisad* and hence reduce their impact on the natural environment. This means a separate environmental consciousness is not necessary for practising Muslims, since following *iktisad* will consume wisely, therefore automatically reduce their demand on the natural environment and the production of waste. This is highly significant given that awareness of the destruction caused by consumerism has not led consumers to significantly change their behaviour. Environmental *iktisad*, therefore, means Muslims following God's command to implement *iktisad* will reduce their impact on the natural environment, providing a real solution to global environmental destruction caused by consumerism. It also means anyone looking to develop themselves and increase contentment, regardless of religious belief, can be motivated to implement *iktisad* and hence provide an important solution to environmental destruction.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>115</sup> Nursi, *The Flashes Collection*, 189.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 196-197.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 197.

## CONCLUSION

Consumerism is recognised as a major contributing factor to global environmental destruction, based on exponential growth, exploitation of natural resources as a means of profit and appealing to the desires of individuals to consume more and more products. Yet, despite worldwide recognition of global environmental problems by consumers, little change in consumer habits has resulted.

The Islamic concept of *iktisad*, which is usually applied to food and wealth, offers a vital solution to the problem of overconsumption. It involves the utilisation of products and natural resources within the limits assigned by God, not going into excess or waste. It significantly reduces the impact on the natural environment through reducing demand for natural resources and reducing waste. *Iktisad* recognises that greed is a natural desire that must be trained to develop appreciation and contentment with fewer resources and by developing a relationship with God. *Iktisad* provides this contentment through gratitude and enhanced pleasure of resources used, acknowledging blessings received.

Importantly, Islamic environmental *iktisad* not only provides a solution to consumerism, but is also an important means of spiritual and personal development. It provides a means of acknowledging and appreciating God and blessings attained, a means of reflecting on God and understanding His Attributes, and a means of obeying God, which is the ultimate aim of Islam. It is also a means of detachment from material goods, allowing increased gratitude, satisfaction and developing relationships with families, friends, neighbours and others. While this provides an important motivation for Muslims and other religious people, non-religious people can also be motivated through the increased contentment that results from increased gratitude.

Environmental *iktisad* contains recognition that every part of Creation has been designed in perfect balance and measure, every species praises God and is an important component of an interdependent universe. While natural resources are provided for use of human beings, it is important to weigh up the necessity of their use, with the intention of their Creation and God's prohibition of waste. Muslims seek to develop a relationship with God's Creation and use the example of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) who was content with minimal possessions, truly appreciating each resource he used.

Importantly, Islamic environmental *iktisad* provides the motivation for human beings to consume wisely, hence protecting the environment, without the necessity of a separate environmental consciousness. This is because Muslims seek to please God, obey God, develop a closer relationship to God and spiritually develop themselves. Additionally, Muslims believe they are accountable for every action, which includes how they enact their role of steward in protecting and maintaining every species on Earth. Not only can it be implemented by practising Muslims, but due to the benefits it can appeal to all others as well. These motivating factors of *iktisad*, combined with the environmental benefits of its implementation, mean it offers a real, lasting solution to environmental destruction caused by consumerism.