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Towards a Sustainable Ramadan

Mohamed Abdelraouf
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Towards a Sustainable Ramadan

Fasting during the holy month of Ramadan for Muslims involves one refraining from food and drink from dawn to dusk, as well as turning their attention to prayer, charity, helping others, and performing good deeds. Ramadan also offers a real chance to inculcate a positive change in one's habits and attitude toward the environment. It is the month when a Muslim can make a substantive change to his or her lifestyle.

Abstaining from food and drink is, in many ways, the easiest part. In order for a Muslim's fast to be done correctly, and thus accepted, it must be done with an attitude of good intention and responsibility. Without a doubt, adopting an eco-friendly lifestyle in general, but especially during Ramadan, is not only a social responsibility but also a religious duty, as contributing to a healthy environment is a vital part of preserving human existence and well-being.

Ramadan is an opportunity—one must seize this time to change their lifestyle and look for ways to build a more environmentally friendly way of living that will benefit them and their family, as well as all of mankind. The world as we know it is facing multiple planetary crises, not the least of which are climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, poverty, food shortages, and the spread of disease. Ramadan is the time of year when we reflect on how we are contributing to these challenges through bad habits, addictions, and/or negligence in our day-to-day lives. Through this realization, we have the opportunity to make necessary changes and do our part to contribute to the solution.

Water Consumption

In the Gulf specifically, special attention should be paid to conserving water resources given that it is a water-scarce region. Even within Islam, the importance of preserving our resources is emphasized. We are guided by the teachings of Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) not to waste water, for example, during *wudhu* (the ablution performed before prayers) “even if we are sitting on the banks of a running river.” All natural resources on earth, like the human body, need some rest and fasting is a golden opportunity to enable natural resources in our environment, to be revived, restored, purified, and renewed.

Energy Fasting

Nowadays, in an era of climate change crisis and mounting concerns over energy security where all countries are struggling to cut down greenhouse gases and looking for new, clean sources of energy, it is very important to expand the concept of fasting to cover energy consumption as well.

By engaging in ‘energy fasting,’ one can send a message to younger generations and non-Muslim colleagues about the importance of conserving our rare resources. Energy fasting is very similar to food fasting. As fasting is meant to pause our dependence on worldly needs and desires, so too we should practice being less dependent on man-made energy resources. This includes the more frequent use of renewable energy, reducing and rationalizing energy consumption, and using energy-saving instruments.

Other simple ways to show environmental stewardship, whether for individuals or businesses, are using energy-saving lighting, turning off lights and computers when not in use, running



dishwashers and washing machines only when they are full, making the best use of daylight, as well as using public transportation, such as the metro, or carpooling when possible. Such practices save money and resources, are more cost-effective for the user and make a positive impact on the environment at the same time.

Sustainable Consumption

Unsustainable consumption goes against Islamic values. Extravagance must be avoided at all times, but especially during Ramadan. In 1992, Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) was recognized as an overarching theme to link environmental and development challenges at the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. One outcome of this was Sustainable Development Goal No. 12, emphasizing sustainable consumption and production patterns which are key to sustaining the livelihoods of current and future generations.

To put it simply, our planet is running out of resources, but populations are continuing to grow. If the global population reaches 9.8 billion by 2050, the equivalent of almost three planets will be required to provide the natural resources needed to sustain current lifestyles.¹ In fact, sustainable consumption has become a necessity now that the world is facing various environmental crises related to water, climate change, food, and energy. A shift in the way goods and services are produced and consumed will guarantee a better quality of life, a minimum of waste and pollution, avoidance of a disturbed ecological balance, intergenerational and intragenerational equity, and sustainable development.

Many of the above concepts are rooted in Islamic teachings. Islam talks not only of the relationship between Allah and man and between peoples, but also provides guidelines on how to deal with our environment and natural resources in a better way. Man's mission is to improve things or, at the very least, to maintain things as they are. From an environmental perspective, this is the idea of quality of life.

Food Waste

Despite the Islamic teachings urging restraint, Ramadan has in many ways become a month of over-consumption, especially of food products. Iftars (the meal where one breaks the fast at sunset) have become extravagant spreads rather than a humble breaking of the fast. Tackling food waste during this time is a good starting point for Muslims seeking to contribute to cutting back on food waste. On a grander scale, food waste and food scarcity require dedicated policies, informed by data, as well as investments in technology, infrastructure, education, and monitoring. A staggering 931 million tons of food is wasted each year, despite a large portion of the global population going hungry.²

¹ UN, "Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns."

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-consumption-production/>, Accessed on 15 March 2024.

² Green Policy Platform. "GO4SDGs Launches Second Edition of Sustainable Ramadan."



According to the State of Food Waste report in West Asia report in 2021,³ during Ramadan 30–50% of food prepared in Saudi Arabia goes to waste, alongside 25% in Qatar and 40% in the United Arab Emirates, revealing an urgent call to action to tackle food waste in the region. Food waste has reached around 33 percent and is estimated to cost SR40 billion per year, in Saudi Arabia.⁴ The Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture in the Kingdom states that large amounts of meat end up in the garbage during Ramadan, creating added challenges for the agricultural sector. The average person in the Kingdom wastes more than 184 kg of food each year, amounting to a total of 4 million tons nationwide, worth \$10.7 billion) a year.

On the plus side, Saudi Arabia launched in 2023 an awareness campaign to encourage people to be more frugal during the holy month of Ramadan and reduce wastefulness.⁵ Authorities in Saudi Arabia have called for “rational behavior” when people break their fast during Ramadan. This includes campaigns to educate people about ways to preserve meat and reduce waste, including through improved storage and refrigeration. Another way to support this endeavor is by changing one’s shopping habits, buying eco-friendly products, and following the rule of the 3Rs—reducing, reusing, and recycling products and plastic bags as much as possible.

This falls in line with Islamic principles that require man to work towards the conservation of the earth, ensuring that natural resources are managed sustainably for future generations. One must not be extravagant in consumption, whether of food, clothing or in the use of natural resources. It is cited in the Holy Quran: “Eat and drink of that which Allah has provided and do not act corruptly, making mischief on the earth” (2:60).

Ecological Footprint

The Ecological Footprint is now widely used around the globe as an indicator of environmental sustainability. It can be used to measure and manage the use of resources throughout the economy.

<https://www.greenpolicyplatform.org/news/go4sdgs-launches-second-edition-sustainable-ramadan>, Accessed on 12 March 2024.

3 UN Environment, “The State of Food Waste in West Asia.”

<https://www.unep.org/resources/report/state-food-waste-west-asia#:~:text=It%20sets%20out%20a%20comprehensive,occurring%20at%20the%20household%20stage>, Accessed on 11 March 2024.

4 Arab News. “Saudi authorities urge public to avoid food waste during Ramadan.”

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2476391/saudi-arabia>, Accessed on 14 March 2024.

5 Asharq Awsat. “Saudi Arabia Launches Campaign to Reduce Food Waste.”

<https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/4240471/saudi-arabia-launches-campaign-reduce-food-waste>, Accessed on 14 March 2024.



It is commonly used to explore the sustainability of individual lifestyles, goods and services, organizations, industries, regions, and nations.

The idea of the footprint is rooted in Islamic culture and values. It is referred to in many examples and verses in the Quran and the Sunnah that urge Muslims to reduce their footprint and ask them to live lightly on earth. The Quran describes believers of Allah as those who “walk on the Earth in humility” (Quran, 25:63). Of course, every individual is in control of what he uses, what he eats, what he does, and where he goes and will thus leave behind an ecological footprint.

One’s ecological footprint is determined by their consumption patterns and the total amount of pollution and emissions that they produce in their lifetime through their use of energy, especially fossil fuels, transportation, electricity, and consumption of certain foods and goods that require transportation and/or industrial fertilizers and so on.

The bottom line is that there is a need to re-think many of the current consumption patterns from a sustainability point of view. Green consumption should occupy a permanent place in one’s mind at all times, but especially during the month of Ramadan, and that means doing more to protect and support the environment, taking into consideration the carrying capacity and ecological footprint that one will leave behind. In other words, our God-given natural resources should be able to support current as well as future generations.

Let us seize the opportunity that Ramadan offers by adopting exemplary behavior that tackles environmental problems and let us hope that this responsible pro-environment lifestyle will continue even after Ramadan ends. There is at this time, an opportunity to make real, lasting change.

What’s more, religious authorities should seize the opportunity provided by Ramadan gatherings during the Taraweeh prayers (which follow Isha prayers throughout the whole month) and Friday prayers to educate on and encourage the adoption of an eco-friendly lifestyle--a message that can be spread both by word and by example to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Wishing you all a blessed and sustainable Ramadan!

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