

Spirituality and Sustainability

EXPERIENCES OF
THE INTERNATIONAL
ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

Edited by
Abdul Rashid Moten

With a foreword by Professor Emeritus Tan Sri Dato' Dzulkifli Abdul Razak,
Rector, the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)



IIUM



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CHAPTER 1

**Spirituality
and Sustainable
Development Goals**

M. Kamal Hassan

Evil has appeared throughout the land and sea because of what the hands of mankind have earned, that He may cause them to taste some of what they have done, in order that they may return (to the right deeds) (Al-Qur'ān, 30:41).

The latest news regarding the world climate change crisis is most alarming. It is reported that “11,258 scientists in 153 countries from a broad range of disciplines warn that the planet ‘clearly and unequivocally faces a climate emergency’” (Freedman, 2019). Unless there are major transformations “in the ways our global society functions and interacts with natural ecosystems,” people of the world face “untold suffering due to the climate crisis.” The scientists say that “[t]he climate crisis is closely linked to excessive consumption of the wealthy lifestyle.” They lament:

Despite 40 years of global climate negotiations, with few exceptions, we have largely failed to address this predicament. Especially worrisome are potential irreversible climate tipping points. These climate chain reactions could cause significant disruptions to ecosystems, society, and economies, potentially making large areas of Earth uninhabitable (Carrington, 2019).

Those scientists make it clear that nations and human societies have to “end the destruction of nature and restore forests and mangroves to absorb CO₂; [consume] mostly plants and less meat, and reduce food waste; [and] shift economic goals away from GDP growth” (Damian Carrington, 2019). They therefore focussed on six key objectives: “replacing fossil fuels; cutting pollutants like methane and soot; restoring and protecting ecosystems; eating less meat; converting the economy to one that is carbon-free and stabilising population growth” (Weston, 2019).

Prior to this study, 15,000 scientists issued a warning in 2017 regarding the dangers of pollution and mass extinction of wildlife on Earth. Earlier in 1992 “World Scientists” called for a “great change in our stewardship of the Earth and the life on it ... if vast human misery is to be avoided” (Carrington 2019). Given the magnitude of “the climate emergency” that planet earth is facing coupled with social, political, economic, and ethical crises plaguing the contemporary world, humanity appears to be heading headlong towards major global catastrophes before the end of the 21st century. Several world conferences and summits, which addressed the common threats and negative global impacts of modernity’s unsustainable development trajectories and ecological crises, have been held for the last two decades, culminating in the world-wide adoption of U.N. Agenda 2030 with its 17 SDGs in 2015.

The importance of holistic development and the need to incorporate ethical and spiritual values in development policies and strategies appears to have been acknowledged in several world conferences and summits, but as those acknowledgements were not part of mainstream narratives, and the implementation of work plans were subjected to the priorities of individual countries or organisations, the urgency for making spirituality and ethics as ideational foundations of sustainable development goals has not been given the attention it deserves. But the latest urgent warning of a global climate emergency by 11,258 scientists referred to above is calling for a fundamental change in “how we live” and major transformations “in the ways our global society functions and interacts with natural ecosystems.” The global transformations urgently needed to avert a global catastrophe make it imperative that contemporary human beings, societies and cultures address urgently not just the economic, social and environmental causes of the crises of planet Earth and the world, but the non-material or metaphysical dimension of human existence as well, namely the relationship with the Creator, Sustainer and Owner of the universe or cosmos.

Meaning of Spirituality in the Worldview of Islam

Spirituality means different things to different peoples. Some regard spirituality as an independent phenomenon and not as part of any religion. Others consider spirituality as anything that is non-material in nature. In Islam, spirituality (*al-rūhiyyah*) refers to the condition of faith (*īmān*) in the spiritual heart (*qalb*) of human beings, in the One and Only God, Allāh (SWT), who is the Creator, the Sustainer, the Controller and the Provider of all that exists in the heavens and the earth. This spiritual heart is a spiritual entity

comprising also of three other spiritual faculties, namely intellect or mind (*‘aql*), spirit (*rūh*) and soul (*nafs*). Faith in Islam means sincere and profound belief and conviction in Allāh (SWT) with all His attributes and all His teachings and commandments. This inner conviction in the spiritual heart is not of blind faith but that which is also rational and based on evidences revealed in Divine Scriptures and Signs in nature. Not only has the inner conviction to be expressed verbally by the tongue but it has to be manifested, represented and embodied through all forms of good deeds or virtuous actions (*‘amal ṣāliḥ*) by the believer (*al-mu’min*).

Islamic Spirituality

Islamic spirituality refers to the quality of the condition of connectedness of the spiritual heart of human beings as servants of God to their Creator-Sustainer, Who created them for the sacred purpose of knowing, worshipping and serving Him in this worldly life. It is the spiritual heart that lives on and returns to the Creator upon the death of the body. Then on the Day of Resurrection all human beings will be brought back to life to face the Judgement by Him with regard to all that they have done in this worldly life. It is the ardent wish and prayer of true believers to return to Him ultimately “with a sound and pure heart (*qalb salīm*)” (Al-Qur’ān, 26: 88-89) to enjoy everlasting happiness in His Paradise, avoiding the severe punishment in perdition. Spirituality, from an Islamic perspective, is the inner core and the soul of the religion of Islam, the religion of complete submission to the will of Allāh (SWT).

The people of Islamic spirituality, the believers (*al-mu’minūn*), are described in the Qur’ān and the *ḥadīth* of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as having many praiseworthy characteristics, ranging from their most private individual communions with God, their generous spending of wealth, knowledge or physical energy for numerous societal benefits simply to gain the pleasure of Allāh (SWT), to their readiness to sacrifice their lives in defence of truth and justice, religious beliefs or homeland. The inseparability of Islamic spirituality from its manifestation in all kinds of socially, economically, ethically or environmentally beneficial deeds is a unique feature of the religion of Islam. Hence the pairing of faith and good virtuous deeds – or spirituality and social action – is emphasised throughout the Qur’ān: faith represents, as it were, the root of the tree of Islam, while good deeds represent the visible and beneficial fruits of the single blessed tree (Al-Qur’ān, 14:24-25). This conditionality of good deeds or good conduct for the validity of faith or Islamic spirituality is emphasised and affirmed by many Qur’ānic verses. The Prophet (SAW) is

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Spirituality and Sustainability

EXPERIENCES OF

THE INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

The International Islamic University Malaysia has, since 2018, redoubled its struggle to restore its wisdom, strengths, and dignity and promote comprehensive excellence. Hence, the University adopted the United Nations' sustainable development agenda as a complement to the University's vision and mission of Islamisation, Integration, Internationalisation and Comprehensive Excellence.

The book explains the ways in which the SDGs will provide a new strategy to apply the concept of Islamisation, which has long been the foundation of the IIUM. Consequently, the university's operations and facilities have been adjusted so that they become mediums in applying and showcasing a lifestyle that is sustainable. Everything in the university i.e. the curricular and extra-curricular courses, the research activities, and everyday operations in administrative offices and other places are geared towards sustainable development in line with the maqāṣid al-sharī'ah. Elements of sustainability are integrated in every aspect of the university's administration and, indeed, in teaching, research and community engagement. Consequently, the IIUM has adopted "Humanising Higher Education through maqāṣid al-sharī'ah and SDGs" as its official strategic mission.

ABDUL RASHID MOTEN served as Senior Professor in Political Science at the International Islamic University Malaysia. Currently, he is Guest Writer at IIUM, and has published 24 books and monographs and contributed more than 200 articles to peer-reviewed journals and encyclopedias.

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