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Maulana Wahiduddin Khan on water conservation, written from an Islamic perspective

If we cannot create water, then why do we foolishly waste it, asks MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

Water is a great boon for life. And the greater the boon, the greater the conservation required. Without it, life could not exist on earth. Without water, there could be no development of a civilisation. In the absence of water, the earth would become barren like other planets in the solar system and beyond. It is this reality towards which the Quran points the reader when it asks: 'Have you considered if your water were to sink into the ground, who could then bring you flowing water?' (67:30) The importance of water cannot be overstated. Up to 60 per cent of the body of adult humans comprises water. The Quran says that God has made every living thing out of water. (21:30). Abdur Rahim Khan-i Khanan was an important minister and Urdu poet during the Mughal rule in India. A line from one of his poems is: Rahiman pani rakhiyo bin pani sab soon — Rahim, preserve water, as without water there is nothing!

It is a fact that water is a great bounty bestowed by the Creator upon us. If we look at it in this perspective, we realise what a great source of spirituality water is, as it reminds us of the merciful Creator. This important natural resource evokes the spirit of gratitude. Human life is so very dependent on water that our reliance on water repeatedly brings to mind the Creator. According to Islam, the quality most desired in a person is his willingness to acknowledge the Creator. If a person truly discovers the value of water, he will see it as a source of spiritual nourishment. Water is a symbol of the virtues of peace, tolerance and the giving spirit, traits that human beings need to develop. If a spiritual culture is fostered in human society, its every member will take great care to not waste water. Such people will make sustainable use of this precious resource. The discovery of the importance of water will tell one how to manage water properly. The Prophet of Islam laid great emphasis on conserving water. He once observed someone using water extravagantly and advised him to be very cautious in its use. The person in question asked if we needed to be meticulous even while using water. The Prophet replied: "Yes, do not waste water, even if you are on the banks of a flowing river." There are many verses in the Quran that make such references to water. When studied in the light of modern scientific data, one will realise that the oceans on earth are not only reservoirs of water, but also oceans of spirituality. Water is made by the coming together of two gases: hydrogen and oxygen.

Two elements which are individually gaseous in nature, combine to produce liquid water. Nature has gathered this water in the seas and the oceans. At least 3.5 per cent of this seawater contains salt, which acts as a preservative. Because of its salty taste, we cannot drink it or otherwise make use of it. But by the workings of the laws of nature, the water in the oceans and seas rises up into the atmosphere as water vapour, being separated in this way from the salt content. This water vapour then collects together to form clouds, which bring rain. Rainwater is fresh water that we can put to use for our various daily needs. This entire process, known as the hydrological cycle, takes place on a global scale. If one were to ponder over this phenomenon, one would become extremely thankful to God. Spirituality is only the other name of this thankfulness. This spirit becomes a disincentive to squandering this crucial blessing. Such a person is bound to develop strong thinking and will certainly ask himself: 'If I cannot create water, how can I waste it?'