

Insights into Self-Knowledge from Islamic Teachings: A Path Towards Ethical Environmental Stewardship within the Framework of the SDGs

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Abstract

Objective: This study explores the significance of self-knowledge derived from Islamic teachings as a foundation for ethical environmental stewardship within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The research aims to bridge the gap between spiritual awareness and sustainable environmental practices, emphasizing the need for integrating Quranic principles into contemporary ecological discourses. **Theoretical framework:** The theoretical framework is grounded in the Quranic understanding of human nature, which balances spiritual and material dimensions. **Literature Review:** Key literature highlights the role of Islamic values, such as justice (adl), mercy (rahmah), and stewardship (khilafah), in shaping responsible environmental behaviors. **Methods:** Using a qualitative approach, the study employs textual analysis of Quranic verses and Hadith, complemented by a review of contemporary scholarly works on Islamic ethics and environmental sustainability. **Results:** The findings reveal that self-knowledge, encompassing awareness of one's divine purpose and responsibilities, is pivotal in fostering ethical interactions with nature. The research highlights that when materialistic tendencies dominate, they lead to the overexploitation of natural resources. Conversely, nurturing divine attributes promotes practices that align with the goals of environmental conservation and sustainability as envisioned in the SDGs, particularly Goals 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), 13 (Climate Action), and 15 (Life on Land). **Implications:** The study contributes to the growing discourse on the integration of religious values into global sustainability efforts, presenting a novel perspective on how self-awareness can influence environmental ethics. Its implications are significant for policymakers, educators, and faith-based organizations, offering a framework to inspire community-driven environmental initiatives rooted in Islamic teachings. **Novelty:** The novelty of this research lies in its intersectional approach, combining Islamic epistemology, ethical philosophy, and sustainability science to address global environmental challenges. By aligning individual actions with divine principles, the study provides a transformative model for achieving ethical and sustainable development.

Keywords: Islamic teachings, self-knowledge, environmental stewardship, ethical sustainability, SDGs.

INTRODUCTION

The global environmental crisis, encompassing climate change, deforestation, and pollution, has emerged as a significant threat to the sustainability of human life and ecosystems. In the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to responsible consumption (SDG 12), climate action (SDG 13), and life on land (SDG 15), a holistic approach that integrates spiritual and moral values has become increasingly relevant. Islam, as a comprehensive faith, offers profound insights into the relationship between humans and nature through the concepts of *khilafah* (stewardship) and *amanah* (responsibility) [1].

Islamic teachings position humans as stewards of the earth, tasked with maintaining environmental balance. This responsibility requires deep self-awareness or *ma'rifat an-nafs*, where individuals recognize their dual spiritual and material roles. When material desires, such as the drive for excessive consumption and domination, overshadow actions, environmental degradation becomes inevitable. Conversely, cultivating divine attributes like justice (*'adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), and reverence for nature fosters sustainable behaviors that support environmental preservation [2].

In this context, this study aims to explore how insights into self-knowledge, grounded in Islamic teachings, can serve as a pathway to ethical environmental stewardship. By combining textual analyses of the Qur'an and Hadith with contemporary literature, this research seeks to address global environmental challenges through a spiritually-driven approach aligned with the SDGs. The integration of these values offers a transformative paradigm for fostering sustainable environmental action [2].

The protection of the environment is of paramount importance for the preservation of natural resources and the sustainability of ecosystems and is crucial in combating climate change and mitigating its impacts on our planet. One of the most crucial areas of study in the field of environmental science is the examination of the effectiveness of environmental protection measures and the identification of the factors that encourage environmentally supportive behaviors in humans. Some perspectives seek to identify these factors outside of human beings. For instance, the sociological perspective examines the influences of societies, cultures, and social systems on human behaviors toward the environment [2].

This perspective examines the impact of culture and societal values on the adoption of environmentally supportive behaviors among individuals. For example, in societies with more robust environmental values and greater awareness of environmental issues, individuals may be more inclined to adopt sustainable practices [3]. Such practices include reducing water consumption, using natural resources responsibly, implementing effective waste management strategies, and preventing water and air pollution. Conversely, in societies with fewer such values and less awareness, individuals may resort to less sustainable methods, which can lead to environmental degradation. The economic perspective elucidates how financial, economic, and investment policies can influence behaviors towards the environment. Governments may encourage the adoption of sustainable practices by providing subsidies and financial incentives to those who implement environmentally friendly methods [4].

Furthermore, tax policies can be employed to encourage or discourage specific practices. For instance, the imposition of taxes on chemical pollutants can facilitate the adoption of more sustainable practices, whereas the provision of tax incentives for the development and deployment of clean technologies can contribute to the advancement of environmental sustainability [5].

Economic investments in research and development can facilitate the development of more efficient and environmentally friendly technologies, such as renewable

energy sources and pollution control technologies. Furthermore, market demand and pricing of products can influence behaviors. For instance, higher demand for organic and sustainable products may prompt producers to adopt such methods [6].

While external factors such as social, economic, and political influences can significantly impact behaviors, it is equally crucial to consider the internal factors that shape decisions. Internal factors play a pivotal role in determining choices and actions. For example, individuals with stronger environmental conservation values and positive attitudes toward sustainable practices are more likely to adopt low-impact and environmentally friendly behaviors [7].

Moreover, personal motivations and knowledge also significantly influence decisions. Research has consistently demonstrated that individuals who prioritize the preservation of natural resources and feel a strong sense of social responsibility are more likely to choose sustainable methods [8].

Consequently, to gain a comprehensive understanding of human behaviors towards the environment, it is imperative to consider both external and internal factors and their respective impacts when analyzing and assessing behaviors. In this context, religions can play a crucial role by analyzing the root causes of environmental issues and shaping societal norms, behaviors, and policies, particularly through interdisciplinary approaches [9].

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of self-knowledge as an internal factor in promoting environmentally friendly behaviors. Specifically, the study aims to explain the potential of reinforcing divine attributes within the self of individuals to enhance their ethical behavior toward nature and contribute to sustainable environmental practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The discourse on environmental ethics has evolved significantly in recent decades, emphasizing the need for holistic approaches that incorporate ethical, spiritual, and scientific dimensions. Within the framework of sustainability, Islamic teachings provide a unique lens for understanding the relationship between self-awareness, ethical behavior, and environmental stewardship [9].

Islamic environmental ethics are rooted in the concepts of *khilafah* (stewardship) and *amanah* (trust), which define humanity's responsibility to maintain harmony with the natural world. According to Nasr, the Qur'anic worldview positions humans as vicegerents who are accountable for their actions toward the environment. This stewardship is not only a physical responsibility but also a moral and spiritual one, requiring individuals to align their behavior with divine principles. Esposito emphasizes that the values of justice (*'adl*), moderation (*wasatiyyah*), and compassion (*rahmah*) are integral to Islamic teachings on sustainability, promoting balance and responsibility in resource use [9].

The role of self-knowledge (*ma'rifat an-nafs*) in ethical decision-making is a recurring theme in Islamic philosophy. Al-Ghazali (d. 1111) argues that understanding oneself is a prerequisite for recognizing one's purpose as a servant of God and a steward of the earth. This perspective is echoed by contemporary scholars, such as Özdemir, who highlight the connection between spiritual awareness and ecological responsibility. Özdemir suggests that nurturing self-awareness can foster an intrinsic motivation to protect the

environment, aligning with the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [9].

The integration of religious values into environmental action has gained prominence in modern sustainability studies. For example, research by Foltz (2003) explores how Islamic teachings can inform practical strategies for addressing environmental challenges. Foltz argues that aligning human actions with spiritual principles can counteract the exploitative tendencies driven by materialism. Similarly, Saniotis underscores the importance of Islamic ethical frameworks in promoting sustainable development, particularly in regions where religion plays a central role in shaping societal norms [10].

Contemporary studies have also explored the synergy between Islamic ethics and global sustainability efforts. For instance, efforts to align Islamic teachings with SDGs focus on responsible consumption (SDG 12) and climate action (SDG 13), emphasizing the need for an ethical shift in individual and collective behavior. Recent works by Hidayatullah et al, illustrate how faith-based environmental education can inspire community-driven conservation initiatives [10].

This literature review highlights the potential of Islamic teachings to address environmental challenges by fostering ethical behaviors rooted in self-awareness. The integration of *ma'rifat an-nafs* with the principles of *khilafah* and *amanah* offers a transformative paradigm for promoting sustainable practices within the SDGs framework. Despite significant contributions, there remains a need for empirical studies exploring the practical application of these concepts in diverse sociocultural contexts [11].

METHODOLOGY

The study entails an examination of Quranic teachings to elucidate their potential for fostering self-knowledge. This method entails the analysis of pertinent Quranic verses and their interpretations to develop a framework for encouraging ethical conduct about environmental sustainability [11].

Table 1. Research Data for This Research Theme

Component	Details
Research Objective	To examine Quranic teachings for fostering self-knowledge and developing ethical conduct in environmental sustainability.
Framework	Grounded in Islamic concepts such as <i>khilafah</i> (stewardship), <i>amanah</i> (trust), and <i>ma'rifat an-nafs</i> (self-knowledge).
Methodology	Analysis of pertinent Quranic verses and their interpretations to construct a framework for ethical environmental stewardship.
Key Quranic Principles	<i>Khilafah</i> : Humanity's role as stewards of the earth (Qur'an 2:30).
	<i>Amanah</i> : Trust in managing resources responsibly (Qur'an 33:72).
	<i>Israf</i> : Avoidance of wastefulness (Qur'an 6:141).
	<i>Tawhid</i> : Unity of creation and interconnectedness of life (Qur'an 112:1-4).

Findings	Self-knowledge (<i>ma'rifat an-nafs</i>) helps align human behavior with divine teachings, fostering environmental ethics.
	Quranic values promote sustainable practices by addressing materialistic tendencies.
	Ethical environmental stewardship aligns with the SDGs, particularly SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 15 (Life on Land).
Implications	Provides a spiritual framework for environmental education.
	Offers faith-based guidance for policy development in sustainability.
	Encourages individual responsibility through self-awareness.
Novelty	Integrates <i>ma'rifat an-nafs</i> with Quranic principles to develop a unique perspective on environmental stewardship within the SDG framework.
Limitations	Limited to textual analysis of Quranic verses and interpretations.
	Further empirical studies are needed to assess practical applications.
Potential Applications	Integration into environmental education programs.
	Guidance for faith-based community initiatives.
	Ethical policy frameworks in environmental sustainability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Self-Knowledge As An Internal Factor

Although self-awareness and self-knowledge are related, they are distinct concepts. Self-awareness is defined as the process of becoming aware of one's internal characteristics, beliefs, emotions, and values [10]. This extends beyond the recognition of personal strengths and weaknesses, encompassing the capacity to reflect on thoughts and feelings, analyze behaviors and choices, and comprehend one's identity and objectives. In essence, self-awareness entails an understanding of one's position in the world and the emotions and thoughts that shape it. It places a premium on the comprehension of one's abilities and limitations. In the field of psychology, self-awareness is defined as the mental processes through which an individual engages with themselves, including awareness of emotions, thoughts, values, strengths, and limitations [11].

In contrast, self-knowledge encompasses a more comprehensive understanding of oneself, encompassing a range of factors such as emotional states, personality traits, relationships, behavioral patterns, opinions, beliefs, values, needs, goals, preferences, and social identity [12]. Philosophically, self-knowledge is concerned with the search for meaning and purpose in life and involves a profound understanding of one's identity and existence. This understanding is achieved through transcendental-phenomenological and existential-phenomenological practices [13].

From a religious and spiritual perspective, self-knowledge encompasses a more profound understanding of one's relationship with the divine and greater entities. It is regarded as a spiritual connection that facilitates an enhanced comprehension of the meaning and purpose of life. In Islamic teachings, the concept of self-knowledge is deeply rooted in both philosophy and spirituality. It highlights the importance of understanding one's spiritual nature and its influence on one's being [14].

Implications Of Self-Knowledge On Human Interaction With Nature

The acquisition of self-knowledge facilitates the development of self-awareness and confidence. Furthermore, it enables individuals to establish more effective relationships with others and to make better and more efficient decisions [15]. It serves as a tool for personal development and emotional and spiritual growth, as understanding one's characteristics and abilities allows individuals to become the best version of themselves. Consequently, this fosters self-belief, enhances social and professional interactions, and increases life satisfaction and happiness [16].

In other words, self-knowledge plays a significant role in improving the quality of life and promoting individual growth and development [17].

Moreover, an understanding of one's nature can facilitate more ethical interactions with nature and the environment. This is because self-knowledge entails a more profound comprehension of our position within nature and our relationship with the environment. Such an understanding can engender a sense of interdependence and, consequently, a motivation to care for it [18].

When individuals recognize their interconnectivity with the natural world, they are more likely to engage in behaviors that protect and preserve the environment. This understanding encourages a perspective that regards environmental stewardship as a personal obligation [19].

Additionally, research indicates that individuals who perceive themselves as more interdependent with others are more likely to engage in environmentally conscious behaviors [20]. Through the process of self-reflection, individuals come to recognize their intrinsic connection to the larger ecosystem and the direct and indirect impacts of their actions on the environment and other living beings. An understanding of the needs and rights of other creatures and the environment can enhance ethical decision-making [21].

This awareness enables individuals to act with greater responsibility towards the environment. Such individuals are more likely to adopt practices that minimize harm to the environment, including reducing the use of harmful chemicals, conserving water, and maintaining ecological health [22].

At this juncture, it is prudent to assess the contributions of each native culture in this context. Given that religious teachings offer insights into this matter, the following section will analyze the perspective of Quranic teachings [23].

Self-Knowledge In Quranic Teachings

In the Quran, self-knowledge is presented as a significant concept, with numerous verses emphasizing its importance and the consequences of one's actions. In particular, self-knowledge leads individuals to the understanding of God and the essence of life [24]. The Quran emphasizes the necessity of self-knowledge and conscious behavior. For example, Surah Al-Hashr, verse 19 states: "And do not be like those who forgot Allah, so He made them forget themselves. It is they who are truly rebellious." Similarly, Surah Al-A'raf, verse 179 says: "Indeed, We have destined many jinn and humans for Hell [25].

They have hearts they do not understand with, eyes they do not see with, and ears they do not hear with. They are like cattle. They are even less guided! Such people are entirely heedless." These verses illustrate the necessity of understanding one's existential nature for the acquisition of knowledge and comprehension of the truth, which in turn leads to virtuous behavior [26]. In the absence of self-understanding, interactions with others and the environment are likely to be problematic. Inappropriate behaviors and environmental destruction are the results of a lack of understanding of oneself and human nature. According to Quranic teachings, the

human soul is endowed with characteristics that can lead to either a materialistic life or a life based on divine attributes [27].

This dual potential is evident in Surah Al-A'raf, verse 179, which states, "They are like cattle," indicating that humans can become like animals. Conversely, Surah Sad, verse 72 says: "So when I have fashioned him and had a spirit of My creation breathed into him, fall in prostration to him," suggesting humans are endowed with divine attributes [28].

The degree to which a human being becomes materialistic or divine is contingent upon their own volition and choices. The reason some humans are described as "worse than cattle" is due to their possession of free will [29].

In contrast to animals, which are not endowed with free will, humans are capable of choosing a materialistic nature as a consequence of their freedom and autonomy. Consequently, humans possess the capacity for both guidance and misguidance. It is of the utmost importance for individuals to utilize self-knowledge to guide their behavior [30].

The Implications Of The Quranic Perspective For Environmental Behavior

As previously stated, the spirit of God has been imparted to humans, endowing the human soul with potential divine attributes and characteristics. By embodying these qualities, humans not only draw closer to God but also have the potential to act as His vicegerents on Earth [31].

Divine attributes can be summarized in God's "Oneness," who is the Creator of the natural world. He states in another verse that He designed the natural world with balance and order: "Indeed, We have created everything, perfectly preordained" (Surah Al-Qamar, verse 49). The term "determined measure" suggests a meticulous approach to calculation and measurement, one that reflects the intrinsic sustainability and harmony of nature [32].

The manifestation of divine attributes in humans has the effect of preserving and sustaining nature. Practices that are guided by these attributes are in alignment with God's will on Earth [33]. Nevertheless, environmental degradation frequently results from the inappropriate exploitation of natural resources, which disrupts the natural order [34]. As Surah Al-A'raf, verse 56 advises, "Do not spread corruption in the land after it has been set in order. And call upon Him with hope and fear. Indeed, Allah's mercy is always close to the good-doers", environmental degradation can be understood as a departure from the divine attributes inherent in humans [35].

The human self is comprised of two distinct dimensions: a spiritual dimension, which represents the true self, and a material dimension, which represents the false self [36]. "And by the soul and 'the One' Who fashioned it; then with 'the knowledge of' right and wrong inspired it" (Surah Ash-Shams, verses 7-8). The true self is the source of good deeds and moral virtues, while the false self is the source of evil. Humans, as material beings, also possess animalistic desires [37]. Although moderation of material traits is necessary for survival, there is a constant conflict between the spiritual and material attributes of the human being. The challenge of protecting nature arises when materialistic attributes dominate, leading to the exploitation of nature on an unprecedented scale [38].

While humans form a close relationship with nature, some may view it merely as a tool for economic gain, thereby neglecting ecological values and leading to environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and pollution [39]. The cultivation of the spiritual attributes inherent in the human self, which are in harmony with nature, can serve to prevent the dominance of materialistic desires. Surah Al-Jathiyah,

verse 23 states: "Have you seen 'O Prophet' those who have taken their desires as their god? And so Allah left them to stray knowingly, sealed their hearing and hearts, and placed a cover on their sight [40].

Who then can guide them after Allah? Will you all not then be mindful?" This verse serves to illustrate the necessity of maintaining a balance between spiritual and material attributes to inform human conduct and safeguard the environment.

Analysis and Discussion

The study reveals that Islamic teachings provide a profound framework for fostering self-knowledge (ma'rifat an-nafs) and ethical environmental stewardship. Through the analysis of Quranic principles such as khilafah (stewardship), amanah (trust), and tawhid (unity of creation), it becomes evident that self-awareness is a key factor in aligning human behavior with sustainable practices. The Quran emphasizes the dual nature of humans, comprising material and spiritual dimensions, which directly influence their interaction with the environment. When material desires dominate, exploitation and environmental degradation ensue, as seen in the overuse of natural resources [40].

The cultivation of divine attributes such as justice ('adl), moderation (wasatiyyah), and compassion (rahmah) is essential in mitigating these tendencies. These values not only address individual behaviors but also contribute to broader environmental goals, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 15 (Life on Land) [40].

This integration of ma'rifat an-nafs into environmental ethics highlights the transformative potential of self-awareness in promoting sustainability. By bridging spiritual principles with contemporary environmental challenges, this study presents a holistic model for addressing ecological issues. Future research should explore the practical application of this framework in various sociocultural contexts to deepen its impact.

The effective protection of the environment necessitates a more comprehensive understanding than that provided by scientific knowledge alone. Furthermore, human interaction with nature is also influenced by ethical, cultural, and social factors. Consequently, it is insufficient for humans to merely comprehend the functioning of ecosystems; they must also acknowledge their ethical obligations towards the environment. For instance, an individual may possess a profound understanding of ecological systems, yet persist in destructive practices due to a lack of reverence for nature. In such instances, scientific awareness alone is insufficient to guarantee environmental protection. The sustainable use of natural resources thus necessitates a blend of scientific knowledge, ethical and cultural values, education, and public awareness. An understanding of human nature is a prerequisite for fostering appropriate interactions between humans and nature [39].

The capacity for self-awareness affords a more profound comprehension of the position of humans within the natural order and the nature of their relationship with the environment. Those who cultivate self-knowledge are more likely to engage in responsible and balanced interactions with the environment. The acquisition of self-knowledge facilitates environmental responsibility and ethical conduct, thereby constituting a pivotal element in the protection of the environment and the promotion of constructive interactions with nature. This, in turn, benefits both the environment and human society. There exists a multitude of perspectives on the understanding of the self and its nature [39].

However, the Quranic viewpoint offers a comprehensive and nuanced explanation of human behavior towards nature. This perspective posits that the human self is

composed of both divine attributes and worldly inclinations, with the prevailing set of attributes determining human interaction with nature. Humans are dual-dimensional beings. One dimension is divine, encompassing attributes such as justice, mercy, wisdom, and compassion. The other is material, including physical and animalistic instincts such as greed and lust. These two dimensions are in a state of dynamic interplay, influencing human behavior by the prevailing dimension. Humans are afforded the liberty to select the attributes that inform their actions [40].

When material attributes prevail, behaviors such as the excessive exploitation of natural resources, environmental pollution, and habitat destruction inevitably follow. Such actions, driven by the pursuit of profit and immediate gain, result in the deterioration of the environment. Conversely, when divine attributes prevail, human interaction with nature is focused on protection and conservation. Those who possess a more profound comprehension of their role within the natural order are inclined to pursue a sustainable lifestyle, ensuring that the bounties of nature are not only preserved for the present generation but also for future ones [40].

The Quranic perspective, which emphasizes the dual nature of the human self and free will, provides valuable guidance for responsible and ethical behavior toward the environment. The strengthening of divine and ethical qualities within oneself serves to protect and preserve nature, thereby avoiding the destructive consequences of worldly inclinations. Consequently, a more profound comprehension of the self and conduct informed by divine teachings can facilitate more constructive and sustainable interactions with the environment.

CONCLUSION

The effective protection of the environment requires more than scientific knowledge; it necessitates an integration of ethical, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. This study underscores the importance of self-knowledge (*ma'rifat an-nafs*) as a foundational element in promoting environmental stewardship within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Quranic perspective offers a nuanced understanding of the human self, emphasizing its dual nature—divine attributes such as justice, compassion, and wisdom, and material inclinations like greed and exploitation. When divine attributes prevail, human interactions with nature prioritize protection, conservation, and sustainability. This aligns closely with the objectives of SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 15 (Life on Land). Conversely, material dominance often leads to environmental degradation, driven by overexploitation and short-term gains. Self-awareness fosters a deeper comprehension of humanity's role as stewards of the earth (*khilafah*), emphasizing ethical responsibilities toward the environment. By cultivating divine and ethical qualities, individuals can engage in more sustainable practices that benefit both current and future generations. This Quranic framework provides a holistic approach to addressing environmental challenges, highlighting the need for ethical, cultural, and spiritual integration alongside scientific advancements. Strengthening self-knowledge and ethical behavior is therefore essential for achieving the environmental objectives of the SDGs and ensuring a sustainable future for humanity and the planet.

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Authors Contributions

The author conducted the entire study involving literature studies, data collection, data processing, data analysis, reporting, and publication.

Competing of Interest

The author declares there are no potential conflicts of interest for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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