

Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies hosts seminar on Botanic Preservation in Islam

Doha, Qatar, 17 February 2014: Under the Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies (QFIS), a college of Hamad Bin Khalifa University, the Public Policy in Islam Program hosted a recent seminar in collaboration with Qur'anic Botanic Garden Project (QBGP).

The Botanic Preservation in Islam seminar attracted a distinguishable audience of diverse academic and professional sectors who expressed their appreciation and admiration for the seminar theme.

The seminar, which took place at the LAS building within Education City, commenced with a welcome note from Dr Muhammad Khalifa, Director of Al-Qaradawi Center of Islamic Moderation and Renewal. He welcomed Dr Saif Ali Al Hajari, Chairman of Friends of Environment Centre, for his contributions in environment protection in Qatar and the Arab world.

The audience were then shown a short film about QBGP that was initially launched by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, in September 2008. Four speakers then took turns to address the audience.

QBGP's mission is to raise awareness of the plants, botanical terms and conservation principles mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah. It is multidisciplinary and can relate to public policies, ethics, art and design, landscapes and architecture, linguistics, pharmacy

and chemistry. QBGP adopts a number of different roles in order to contribute to community development and enrichment.

So far, the project has managed to collect 22 botanical species, which are all mentioned in the holy Qur'an and Sunnah. These species belong to three geographical areas: the Mediterranean, the Desert and Tropical areas.

Dr Evren Tok, Academic Coordinator of the Master Program of Public Policy in Islam, underlined the cooperative relationship between QFIS and QBGP and how they share common working areas. Both organisations deal with multidisciplinary issues and topics, and try to enhance and activate noble values that can promote economic and social development. They also have mutual interests in environmental and developmental sustainability, preservation of resources and botanic life from an Islamic perspective. Dr Evren Tok also noted that policy makers should consider ethical principles and values when constructing their policies, and should study the internal and external circumstances at local and global levels.

Ms Fatima Saleh Al-Khulaifi, the Project Manager of QBGP introduced the audience to the work of QBGP, its role and the different types of botanic gardens. She also explained the importance of plants being mentioned in the holy Qur'an noting that it is a call to human beings to contemplate, consider and think. She explained that those references proclaim that all living things worship Allah and that it is also an emphasis on the importance of preserving and protecting the environment to achieve sustainability. Ms Fatima Saleh Al Khulaifi continued by highlighting how the metaphoric depiction of plants in the holy Qur'an leads the reader to compare the Earth's plantation to that of Eden's.

The holy Qur'an mentions plants in a metaphorical way to encourage ethical conduct and good behaviour, and also to illustrate certain concepts such as life and death. Similarly, Sunnah persistently urges people to look after, care for and preserve plants. Sunnah considers planting a good deed and one way of worshipping Allah. Planting could even be regarded as a form of charity. Sunnah inspires sustainability by emphasising the importance of consistent planting,

and how it is important to commit oneself to this kind of work through life. Sunnah also recommends some plants for medication however; this does not make it sacred within Islam.

Ms Fatima Al-Khulaifi elaborated that the Islamic gardens were established to serve certain purposes such as recreation, relaxation, contemplation and comfort. They are distinguished by having water, seats and shades like the Taj Mahal, the Persian and Moroccan Gardens. Botanic gardens were established for scientific research and education, with some containing greenhouses such as Kew Gardens and the French Botanic Garden. Biblical gardens are usually designed around a certain theme and use plant species mentioned in the Bible. An example of this is Warsaw Parks and Gardens in Poland.

Dr Jasser Auda, Associate Professor in Public policy in Islam from QFIS, expressed his admiration and respect for QBGP and explained the relationship between Islamic ethics and botanic life. He considered how the Qur'anic Botanic Garden is an ethical garden, and that the ethical garden is actually a Qur'anic garden. He noted how there is a precious wisdom behind the references to seeds and plants in the holy Qur'an, as well as the links to other ideas relating to ethical conduct.

The ethical guidance in Islam takes different forms; some are direct while others teach by looking at the moral when contemplating the universal laws. Some universal laws that govern plants' life are worth considering when studying the plant alongside the biological and physiological aspects of the plant.

If the holy Qur'an is read thematically and methodically, apply the objective interpretation in treating plants, and examine the themes that indicate the rules of how to deal with plants, then the rules and convictions will be the features and objectives of the ethical approach that is expected to hold some Islamic values.

There are abundant verses in the holy Qur'an about nature and plants, and the first theme that attracts attention is plant consciousness, for example; any piece of plant is aware of the divine existence, worships and praises Allah, and performs prayer in its own way. Accordingly, when people tend to plants, individuals should understand that plants have feelings. They should try to connect with them because they are Allah's creatures, and this is one way to appreciate

Allah's strength and power. No harm should be inflicted on plants and Sunnah introduces several incidents that prove that plants are living creatures, just like human beings.

Muslims believe in the union of Allah and understand that although there are common characteristics among all creatures, there are also individual particularities of each living organism that distinguishes it from the next - emphasising the Oneness of Allah and His Almighty power. This perspective pinpoints the differences between the Qur'anic approach in studying the botanic life and the economic one. The former is not governed by the economic or materialistic interests. The diversity theme is another perspective that should be taken into account when dealing with plants and plant preservation. The Qur'anic texts indicate that diversity, whether in human beings, plants, or animals, is a phenomenon that is meant to exist, and that it did not happen haphazardly. Differences in colour, shape and smell inspire the human being towards more appreciation of the divine oneness and power. Preserving this diversity in the plants or animals that may become extinct is an Islamic approach.

The state of balance and stability in this diversity phenomenon is another ethical moral that appears in the Qur'anic text. Because the disturbance of this balance causes corruption, the believer is confident that nature can proceed normally if man does not interfere by causing disturbance on land and sea. However, this does not mean that man should not deal with nature, as there are certain rules and principles that have to be taken into consideration to avoid disturbing the balance of diversity in nature.

There is wisdom behind the creation of every creature and living organism, and behind each colour, smell or shape, the wisdom is not only manifested in the Islamic legislation but also in the creature itself, because each creature has a certain function. This vision calls for extra precaution when dealing with plants. This functional orientation is diverse; some are focussed on nutrition, others on beauty and medication, and contemplating upon this issue forces an individual to glorify Allah, the Oneness, for the graces botanic life brings.

The holy Qur'an has made several analogies between the human life cycle and the life cycle of plants, so that the reader can deduce the ethical moral through similarities and comparisons. These morals teach people how to deal with the botanic life and preserve it.

Dr Jasser concluded his speech by noting that he hoped the Qur'anic garden will contribute to the legacy of human intellect in much the same way as the Hamra Gardens in Spain contributed to the Islamic legacy. The theme of ethics in Islam is interrelated with the relationship with God, the creator. There is a great wisdom behind creating plants in much the same way that there is a great wisdom behind this entire universe and what it contains.

Mr Ahmed El Gharib, a Researcher from GBGP, explained some botanic scientific terminologies with reference to the holy Qur'an and Sunnah. The holy Qur'an contains around 82 botanic expressions related to plants and their physiology and 60 references in Hadiths. There are also 20 kinds of water mentioned in the holy Qur'an.

Studying the botanic terminologies according to the Qur'anic and Sunnah texts enables individuals to understand the meanings of these texts, deduce the virtuous lessons out of it, and understand the parable. Disseminating the botanic culture prepares the reader to infer the ethical objective. Envisaging the rhetorical examples and figures of speech mentioned in texts such as metaphors and similes can direct the reader to pinpoint the ideal behaviour and conduct expected from individuals and societies.

At the end of the seminar, audience members raised a number of questions and a discussion followed.

Ends

About Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies (QFIS)

The Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies was established to achieve intellectual plurality that emphasises the richness and diversity of the Islamic heritage under the umbrella of Hamad Bin Khalifa University. The vision at QFIS is to become a locus of thought and dialogue that leads research and debate in all that relates to Islam and Muslims, be that contemporary concerns or issues of heritage; and that produces scholars who are strongly-grounded in Islamic faith, practice, and civilization, and who are open for engaging with all that their civilization produced, and with the wisdom and thought of other civilizations. www.qfis.edu.qa