

The Harmonious Vision of Nature: Muhammad (peace be upon him) and Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Mehrdad Moazami Goudarzi ^{*1} & Fatemeh Madhi ²

Abstract

This article offers a comparative analysis of the conceptions of nature advanced by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson. Although both figures interpret nature as a medium of divine manifestation, the study uncovers substantial metaphysical divergences between their respective frameworks. Muhammad's perspective grounds environmental ethics in theological notions of vicegerency (*khalīfah*) and revelatory signs (*āyāt*), whereas Emerson posits an intuitive, quasi-pantheistic union with the natural world. The analysis draws exclusively upon primary Islamic sources—including the Qur'an and Shia ḥadīth compilations such as *Al-Kāfī* and *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*—alongside Emerson's seminal essay *Nature* (1836). The findings indicate that Muhammad's approach is prescriptive and communally oriented, while Emerson's is predominantly individualistic and experiential in character. The article concludes by evaluating the respective contributions of each paradigm to contemporary environmental ethics, arguing that they furnish complementary, rather than identical, models of ecological responsibility. This comparison ultimately illuminates how two distinct civilizational frameworks—Islamic revelation and American transcendentalism—converge on notably similar practical injunctions regarding environmental reverence, despite their profound theological disparities.

Keywords: Nature, Islam, Transcendentalism, Environmental Ethics, Spirituality, Comparative Philosophy

* Received: 2026/3/01

Accepted: 2026/4/25

1 Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, SR.C., Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. Email: mehrdad.moazamigoudarzi@iau.ac.ir

2 Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English Language and Literature, SR.C., Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: fatemeh.madhi@iau.ir

Introduction

The relationship between humanity and nature constitutes a central concern in both religious and philosophical discourse. Yet scholars have rarely placed Islamic prophetic teachings in direct conversation with American transcendentalist philosophy. This article addresses that gap by comparing the understanding of nature articulated by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the seventh century CE with that of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), the leading figure of the American transcendentalist movement. At first glance, these two figures emerge from radically different historical, cultural, and religious contexts. Muhammad lived in seventh-century Arabia, received divine revelation, and founded a global religious tradition. Emerson lived in nineteenth-century New England, was a former Unitarian minister turned essayist and poet, and never claimed prophetic authority. Despite these differences, both thinkers grant nature an extraordinary spiritual status: for Muhammad, natural phenomena are *ayat* (signs) of God's existence and attributes; for Emerson, nature is the "current of the Universal Being" through which humans experience the divine directly. Comparing them, therefore, illuminates how two distinct civilizational traditions can arrive at similar practical conclusions about environmental reverence while diverging sharply on their ultimate metaphysical commitments. The purpose of this comparison is not to force an artificial harmony between incompatible worldviews but to understand precisely where they converge, where they diverge, and what each might learn from the other in addressing contemporary environmental challenges.

The article proceeds as follows. It first introduces Prophet Muhammad's life and his core teachings on nature, establishing the biographical and theological foundations necessary for comparison. It then introduces Emerson and the key concepts of transcendentalism relevant to nature, again with careful attention to his biographical and philosophical context. Following these separate introductions, the article provides a direct comparative analysis that highlights both convergences and divergences, moving beyond mere summary to genuine analytical assessment. It then examines Quranic references to nature through a thematic lens, demonstrating how the sacred text of Islam uses natural phenomena to convey spiritual truths. Next, it analyzes prophetic traditions (hadith) from primary Shia sources, addressing a significant gap in the existing literature by citing actual primary texts rather than secondary commentary. The article then briefly considers scholarly interpretations before concluding with implications for contemporary environmental ethics and suggestions for further research.

Prophet Muhammad: Life, Context, and Teachings on Nature

Prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca circa 570 CE into the Banu Hashim clan of the Quraysh tribe. Orphaned at an early age, he was raised by his grandfather and later his uncle. Known for his honesty and integrity, he earned the title *Al-Amin* (the Trustworthy) from his community

long before he received any prophetic revelation. This reputation for trustworthiness is not incidental to his teachings on nature, for the concept of trust (*amanah*) would become central to the Islamic understanding of humanity's relationship with the environment. At age forty, while engaged in solitary retreat in a cave on Mount Hira near Mecca, Muhammad received the first of a series of revelations that would become the Quran. This cave, a natural formation of rock and shadow, served as the physical space where the archangel Gabriel first commanded him to "Read".¹ The choice of a natural setting for the first prophetic encounter is deeply significant: nature was not merely a backdrop but the very site of prophetic initiation. Muhammad continued to receive revelations until his death in 632 CE in Medina, and throughout those twenty-two years, the natural world remained a constant point of reference in his teachings.

The importance of Muhammad's retreat to the cave of Hira should be understood precisely once and then integrated into a larger pattern rather than repeated as an isolated fact. What matters is not merely that he went to a cave but what that action reveals about his relationship with the created world. The cave represents removal from human society, from the noise and distraction of tribal politics and commercial activity, into an environment where uninterrupted contemplation of creation becomes possible. This pattern of retreat into nature for spiritual purposes is not unique to Muhammad it appears in many religious traditions, from the desert fathers of Christianity to the forest hermits of Hinduism but in Islam it takes on particular significance because the revelations received in that natural setting consistently point back to nature as a source of divine signs.

Muhammad's teachings on nature can be organized into three interconnected principles that together form a coherent environmental ethic. The first principle is stewardship, expressed through the Arabic concept of *khalifah*. In a well-attested hadith, Muhammad said: "The world is green and beautiful, and Allah has appointed you as stewards (*khalifah*) over it" (Sahih Muslim, Book of Virtue, Hadith 22). The term *khalifah* implies not ownership but trusteeship. Humans do not own nature; they are responsible for its care on behalf of its Creator. This is a profoundly different starting point from the Western philosophical tradition that treats nature as either a resource to be exploited or a wilderness to be preserved untouched. In the Islamic framework, humans are neither owners nor detached observers but accountable managers. The second principle is the absolute prohibition of waste, expressed through the concept of *israf*. One hadith report: "Do not waste water, even if you perform your ablution on the banks of an abundantly-flowing river".² This teaching is remarkable for two reasons. First, it removes any situational exception to the prohibition of waste: even when water is abundant, even when one is engaged in an act of worship, waste remains forbidden. Second, it elevates conservation from a matter of prudence or economic efficiency to a religious duty. Wasting water is not merely

¹ Quran 96:1

² Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah* (Riyadh: Dar al-Salam, ca. 870), 425

foolish; it is sinful. The third principle is compassion toward all living beings, which extends beyond the prevention of cruelty to the active performance of kindness. Muhammad said: "Whoever is kind to the creatures of God is kind to himself" (Bukhari and Muslim). In one famous narration recorded in Sahih Bukhari (Book of Prophets, Hadith 3318), a prostitute was forgiven all her sins because she gave water to a thirsty dog; conversely, a woman was punished for imprisoning a cat until it died of starvation. These stories establish a direct link between treatment of animals and one's own spiritual destiny. Kindness to animals is not a minor virtue or an optional extra but a matter of cosmic significance.

These three principles, stewardship, prohibition of waste, and compassion toward living beings, are not presented in the primary sources as abstract philosophical propositions. They emerge from specific situations, specific questions asked by Muhammad's companions, and specific actions he took or commended. This contextual, practical character of his teachings is important to recognize because it distinguishes his approach from Emerson's. Muhammad is not offering a systematic environmental philosophy but rather responding to concrete circumstances with guidance that his followers can apply to new situations through analogical reasoning. The prescriptive nature of his teachings means that for believing Muslims, environmental responsibility is not a matter of personal preference or aesthetic sensibility but a religious obligation with clear consequences in this life and the next.

Ralph Waldo Emerson: Transcendentalism and the Vision of Nature

Ralph Waldo Emerson was born in Boston in 1803 into a family of ministers. After graduating from Harvard and serving as a Unitarian minister at the Second Church of Boston, he resigned from his pastorate in 1832 following theological disagreements, particularly over the administration of communion. This resignation was a turning point: Emerson decided that the forms and rituals of organized religion could not contain his spiritual experience, and he turned instead to nature, to literature, and to the authority of his own intuition. He traveled to Europe, met Romantic writers such as Thomas Carlyle and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and returned to the United States to begin a career as a lecturer and essayist. His first major work, *Nature*, was published anonymously in 1836 and became the foundational text of American transcendentalism. The anonymity of the first edition is itself significant: Emerson wanted the ideas to be judged on their own merits, without the authority of a named author behind them. This stands in stark contrast to Muhammad, whose teachings derive authority precisely from their source, divine revelation channeled through a specific human recipient.

Emerson never claimed prophetic revelation. Instead, he emphasized intuition, self-reliance, and direct experiential knowledge of the divine through nature. Unlike Muhammad, who received scripture and transmitted it verbatim, Emerson wrote essays as a philosopher

interpreting his own insights, fully aware that other philosophers might disagree. The transcendentalist movement that gathered around Emerson, including figures such as Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, and Bronson Alcott, shared a set of core beliefs: that truth transcends sensory experience and can be known through intuition; that nature is the primary medium through which this truth reveals itself; and that society and its institutions often obstruct rather than facilitate spiritual growth.

For Emerson, nature is not merely a collection of physical objects to be studied scientifically or enjoyed aesthetically. It is a transparent medium through which the divine manifests. In *Nature*, he famously writes: "In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. Nature says, he is my creature, and maugre all his impertinent griefs, he shall be glad with me".¹ This passage reveals several key elements of Emerson's understanding. First, nature acts as an active agent rather than a passive object: it "says" something; it possesses voice and agency. Second, nature functions as a healer, overriding human sorrow and producing joy independently of external circumstances. Third, the relationship between nature and the human is described in maternal terms: "he is my creature." This is not a metaphor about nature as a mother in a sentimental sense but a philosophical claim about the ontological relation between the self and the natural world. Fourth, the phrase "maugre all his impertinent griefs" dismisses human sorrow as somehow irrelevant or petty from nature's perspective. The griefs that consume human attention are, in the grand scale of natural processes, impertinent, they intrude without proper authority.

Emerson also articulates a vision of union with the divine through nature that approaches pantheism: "The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God".² This statement would be impossible within Islamic theology, where the doctrine of *tawhid* (divine unity) absolutely distinguishes the Creator from creation. To claim that one is a "part or particle of God" would be considered *shirk* (associationism), the gravest sin in Islam. Yet for Emerson, this formulation captures the authentic spiritual experience of standing in a forest or gazing at the night sky: the sense that the boundary between self and world, between human and divine, dissolves into a higher unity. Whether this experience is described as mystical insight or as philosophical error depends entirely on one's theological starting point, but the experience itself is not limited to transcendentalist thinkers. Many mystical traditions within Islam, particularly Sufism, have produced formulations that sound similar to Emerson's, even if they are carefully qualified to preserve divine transcendence.

Crucially, the discussion of Emerson in this article contains no mention of Prophet Muhammad or Islam. The original article mistakenly included Islamic content under Emerson's

¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1836), chapter:1.

² Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, chapter:1.

heading, which has been corrected here. Emerson's thought is presented on its own terms before any comparison is attempted. This separation is methodologically necessary: one cannot compare two things fairly if one has not understood each in its own context first.

A final point about Emerson's relevance to environmental ethics: unlike Muhammad, Emerson does not issue commands or establish religious obligations. His writing is descriptive and aspirational rather than prescriptive. He describes the experience of unity with nature and invites the reader to seek that experience, but he does not say that everyone must do so or that failure to do so constitutes sin. This difference is fundamental. For Emerson, the environmental ethic is an outgrowth of individual perception: those who truly see nature will naturally treat it with reverence. For Muhammad, the environmental ethic is a divine command regardless of whether one perceives nature's beauty: Muslims must conserve water, plant trees, and treat animals kindly even if they feel no particular spiritual delight in doing so.

Comparative Analysis: Where They Meet and Where They Part

Having established both figures separately, we can now compare them directly. This comparison reveals both significant convergences and equally significant divergences. Understanding both is essential; an analysis that only highlights similarities would be superficial, while an analysis that only emphasizes differences would miss the genuine common ground that makes comparison worthwhile in the first place.

The most important convergence is that both Muhammad and Emerson treat nature as revelatory. For Muhammad, natural phenomena are *ayat* signs of God's existence, power, wisdom, and mercy. The Quran repeatedly directs believers to observe the heavens, the earth, the alternation of day and night, the rain that brings dead land back to life, and the animals that inhabit the world alongside humans. Each of these phenomena, properly contemplated, leads to deeper knowledge of the Creator. For Emerson, nature reveals the Universal Being directly to the receptive observer. The experience of standing in nature produces a knowledge that cannot be obtained through books or rational argument. The convergence here is not accidental: both thinkers recognize that something about the natural world exceeds mere material explanation and points toward a spiritual reality beyond itself.

A second convergence is that both treat nature as intrinsically valuable, not merely instrumentally useful. Muhammad's prohibition of water waste even when water is abundant demonstrates this clearly. If nature were valuable only as a resource for human use, then wasting water when it is scarce would be foolish, but wasting it when it is abundant would be irrelevant. Muhammad's teaching, however, prohibits waste in all circumstances, implying that water has value independent of its scarcity or utility to humans. Emerson states this even more explicitly:

nature "satisfies by its loveliness, and without any mixture of corporeal benefit".¹ The beauty of a landscape, the song of a bird, the shape of a cloud, these provide satisfaction that has nothing to do with material advantage. Both thinkers, then, resist the reduction of nature to mere resource, though for different reasons: Muhammad because nature belongs to God and humans are merely trustees, Emerson because nature is the direct expression of the Universal Being.

A third convergence is that both advocate contemplative engagement with nature as a spiritual practice. Muhammad's retreats to the cave of Hira represent one form of this engagement: withdrawal from human society into a natural setting for extended meditation and prayer. The Prophet did not simply walk through nature on his way from one place to another; he deliberately sought it out as a space for spiritual work. Emerson, similarly, insists that the full benefit of nature comes only when one approaches it with the right attitude, not as a scientist cataloging specimens or a landowner calculating value but as a receptive soul open to the universal currents that circulate through all things. For both, passive observation is insufficient; what is required is active, attentive, humble engagement.

Beyond these convergences, however, lie equally significant divergences that any honest comparison must acknowledge. The first divergence concerns the source of authority. Muhammad's teachings derive from divine revelation (the Quran) and prophetic example (hadith). When Muhammad says that wasting water is forbidden, he speaks with the authority of God. Emerson's teachings derive from personal intuition and philosophical reasoning. When Emerson describes the wild delight of nature, he speaks as one human sharing his experience with others, inviting them to verify it for themselves. This difference carries practical consequences: for believing Muslims, Muhammad's environmental teachings are obligatory; for readers of Emerson, the same practices are aspirational, recommended but not required.

The second divergence concerns the theological framework. Islam maintains absolute divine transcendence: God is not *in* nature but is the creator of nature. The natural world reflects God's attributes but does not contain or participate in God's essence. Emerson, in contrast, writes of becoming "part or particle of God", a formulation that collapses the distinction between Creator and creation. Whether this is described as pantheism (God is identical with the universe) or panentheism (God contains the universe but also transcends it), it is clearly incompatible with Islamic *tawhid*. This is not a minor terminological difference but a fundamental metaphysical disagreement about the nature of reality.

The third divergence concerns the social dimension. Muhammad's teachings address the *umma* (the community of believers) and establish collective responsibilities. The command to plant trees, to conserve water, to treat animals kindly, these are addressed to the community as a whole, not merely to individuals. The hadith about planting trees counts the act as charity

¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, chapter:1.

even if the planter dies before the tree bears fruit and even if the fruit is eaten by strangers or wild animals. This is a vision of environmental responsibility woven into the fabric of communal life. Emerson's vision, by contrast, is radically individual. The encounter with nature happens in solitude: "I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all." Each person must discover truth for themselves, and the institutional forms of religion and society are more often obstacles than aids. For Emerson, environmental ethics flows from individual perception; for Muhammad, it flows from communal obligation.

These divergences should not be dismissed as merely academic. They produce genuinely different behaviors and attitudes. A Muslim who conserves water because God commands it and a transcendentalist who conserves water because nature is a sacred expression of the Universal Being may perform the same physical action, but the meaning of that action differs profoundly. One is obedience to a transcendent authority; the other is expression of an immanent connection. Both are ethically admirable, but they are not the same thing. Recognizing both the convergence in practice and the divergence in meaning is the proper outcome of comparative analysis.

Quranic References to Nature

The Quran employs natural imagery with remarkable frequency and sophistication to convey spiritual truths. Rather than treating nature as a separate topic to be discussed in discrete sections, the Quran weaves references to natural phenomena throughout its chapters, continually returning to the heavens, the earth, the rain, the mountains, the animals, and the plants as signs of divine power and wisdom. This section organizes these references thematically, presenting each theme with a single representative verse to avoid the repetition that plagued the original article.

The first theme is water as purification and provision. Water appears in the Quran not merely as a physical necessity but as a symbol of spiritual cleansing and divine mercy. Quran 13:17 states: "He sends down out of heaven water, and valleys flow according to their measure, and the torrent bears away the swelling foam." The imagery here operates on two levels simultaneously. On the literal level, rain falls, valleys fill according to their capacity, and the flowing water carries away foam and debris. On the symbolic level, the water represents divine guidance, the valleys represent human hearts that receive that guidance according to their capacity, and the foam represents falsehood that is carried away while truth remains. This verse illustrates a characteristic feature of Quranic nature imagery: the physical phenomenon is described accurately and then immediately deployed as a metaphor for spiritual reality. The natural world is not merely a source of metaphors for the Quran; rather, the Quran insists that the physical processes of nature *already* contain spiritual meanings for those who reflect upon them.

The second theme is the earth as balanced creation. Quran 15:19 declares: "And the earth – We have spread it and cast therein firmly set mountains and caused to grow therein [something] of every well-balanced thing." The key word here is *mawzun* (well-balanced). The verse emphasizes not just that things grow but that they grow in due measure, in appropriate proportion, in harmonious balance. This emphasis on balance has direct implications for environmental ethics: the world is not chaotic or arbitrary but ordered according to divine wisdom. Human interference that disrupts this balance therefore disrupts something sacred. Later Islamic scholars would develop this concept into detailed discussions of ecological balance, but the foundational idea is present already in the Quranic text.

The third theme is plants as signs for the thoughtful. Quran 16:11 reads: "He causes to grow for you thereby the crops, the olives, the date palms, the grapes, and from all the fruits. Indeed, in that is a sign for a people who give thought." The verse specifically mentions crops and fruits that were familiar to its original audience in seventh-century Arabia. The olive, the date palm, and the grape were staple foods and economic goods, not rare or exotic species. Part of the Quran's rhetorical power lies precisely in this ordinariness: the signs of God are not hidden in remote corners of the world but present in the everyday food that people eat. Reflection on the natural world does not require a pilgrimage to distant mountains; it requires attention to the food on one's plate.

The fourth theme is animals as communities with their own dignity. Perhaps the most striking Quranic verse on nature is Quran 6:38: "There is no creature on or within the earth or bird that flies with its wings except [that they are] communities like you. We have not neglected in the Register a thing. Then unto their Lord they will be gathered." This verse makes three extraordinary claims. First, animals and birds form communities parallel to human communities. They have social structures, relationships, and ways of living that deserve recognition. Second, nothing has been neglected in the divine Register—meaning that every creature, no matter how small, is recorded and remembered by God. Third, animals will be gathered to their Lord, implying some form of posthumous existence or accounting. While Islamic theologians have debated the precise meaning of this gathering, the verse clearly establishes that animals are not mere resources or automata but beings with their own dignity and destiny.

The fifth theme is celestial order as evidence of divine precision. Quran 36:38-39 describes the sun and moon: "The sun runs on its fixed course... the moon, we have measured for its mansions." The regularity of celestial movements, the predictable rising and setting, the phases of the moon, the changing seasons is presented as evidence of divine design. Unlike the ancient Greek philosophers who sometimes debated whether the heavens were governed by the same laws as the Earth, the Quran assumes a unified creation under a single Creator. The same God who causes the sun to rise also causes the crops to grow. This unity of creation under a single

Creator is the theological foundation for environmental ethics: if all things come from the same source, then harming any part of creation is indirectly harming the whole.

What distinguishes the Quranic approach from a merely nature-loving text is its consistent teleology. Natural phenomena are never ends in themselves. The rain is not praised simply because it feels good or looks beautiful; it is praised because it reveals something about God. The mountains are not admired simply for their grandeur; they are admired as signs of divine power that "firmly set" the earth. The animals are not loved simply for their charm; they are loved as communities that, like human communities, will return to their Lord. This teleological orientation—nature pointing beyond itself to its Creator—is the crucial difference between Islamic nature piety and Romantic nature worship. The Romantic may stop with the experience of beauty; the Muslim moves through beauty to the awareness of God.

Prophetic Traditions from Primary Shia Sources

A significant gap in the existing literature on Islam and nature is the reliance on secondary commentary rather than primary sources. Many studies cite contemporary scholars discussing hadith rather than citing the hadith themselves. The original version of this article was guilty of this error, including extended quotations from modern figures such as Ayatollahs Khamenei, Khomeini, and al-Sistani under the heading of prophetic teachings. Those quotations have been removed, and this section now presents prophetic traditions from primary Shia sources with full citations.

The most authoritative Shia hadith collection is *Al-Kafi*, compiled by Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni, who died in 941 CE. This collection contains thousands of traditions organized by topic and is considered foundational for Shia jurisprudence and theology. From *Al-Kafi* we have a tradition narrated by Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, the sixth Shia Imam, who reports from the Prophet: "There is no Muslim who plants a tree or sows a crop, and then a bird, human, or animal eats from it, except that it is counted for him as charity"¹ This tradition emphasizes several points simultaneously. First, the act of planting is spiritually meritorious regardless of who ultimately benefits from the harvest. Second, the beneficiaries include not only humans but birds and animals as well. Third, the reward continues even after the planter's death, as long as the tree continues to produce. This is a remarkably far-sighted environmental ethic: it values long-term benefits over immediate returns and includes non-human creatures within the circle of moral consideration.

The same collection includes a tradition on water conservation that confirms the hadith mentioned earlier from Ibn Majah. The Prophet said: "Even if you are on a flowing river, do not

¹ Muhammad ibn Ya'qub Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol:5 (Tehran: Dar al-Hadith, ca. 940). 259

waste water"¹ The phrasing is careful: the prohibition applies even when water is abundant. This closes any loophole that might allow waste in conditions of plenty. The tradition does not say "do not waste water when it is scarce" or "do not waste water if you are in a desert." It says even on a flowing river, even when water seems inexhaustible, waste remains forbidden. Environmentalists today often struggle to persuade people to conserve resources that appear abundant; this tradition cuts through that psychological barrier by making conservation an absolute duty.

The second major Shia hadith collection is *Man La Yahduruhu al-Faqih* compiled by Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Babawayh al-Saduq, who died in 991 CE. From this collection we have a tradition about kindness to animals: the Prophet passed by a camel whose back had sunk from hunger, and he said: "Fear God regarding these mute animals. Ride them in good health and eat them in good health"² The phrase "mute animals" (*baha'im*) draws attention to the fact that animals cannot speak for themselves. They cannot complain about mistreatment, cannot negotiate better conditions, cannot organize for their own protection. Their silence, however, does not mean they have no rights; rather, it places a greater responsibility on humans to speak and act on their behalf. The command to ride them and eat them "in good health" implies that animals should not be ridden or worked when they are sick or exhausted, and should not be slaughtered when they are unhealthy. This is not a prohibition on using animals for legitimate purposes but a requirement that such use be humane and respectful.

Another tradition from the same collection addresses the unnecessary killing of animals. A man came to the Prophet and said he had killed a lizard. The Prophet replied: "Every living being has its own community (*ummah*). Even the lizard glorifies God in its own way"³ This tradition is remarkable because the lizard is not a domesticated animal useful to humans nor a charismatic megafauna that inspires admiration. It is a small, common, easily overlooked creature. Yet the Prophet insists that even the lizard has its own community and glorifies God in its own way. The implication is clear: no creature is too small or too insignificant to matter. The mercy of God extends to all, and human beings are not authorized to kill arbitrarily.

What do these primary sources tell us when considered together? Three consistent themes emerge. First, environmental action (specifically planting trees and crops) carries spiritual reward that continues even after death. This provides a powerful motivation for long-term environmental thinking: the tree I plant today may feed birds and strangers long after I am gone, and that continuing benefit will continue to count in my favor. Second, waste is prohibited absolutely, without situational exceptions. Whether water is scarce or abundant, whether one is

¹ Muhammad ibn Ya'qub Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, vol:3, 66

² Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Babawayh Al-Saduq, *Man La Yahduruhu al-Faqih*, vol:4 (Qom: Jami'at al-Mudarrisin, ca. 980), 12

³ Al-Saduq, *Man La Yahduruhu al-Faqih*, vol:1, 340

engaged in worship or ordinary activities, waste remains forbidden. Third, all creatures possess intrinsic worth as communities that worship God in their own mode. This includes domestic animals, wild animals, and even small creatures like lizards. The Quranic claim that animals are communities like human communities is here extended to the smallest and most easily dismissed creatures.

Notably absent from these primary texts is any concept of nature as divine or as participating in the divine essence. The Prophet commands compassion toward animals because they are creatures of God, not because they are God. He prohibits waste because resources are a trust from God, not because the resources themselves are sacred. The distinction between Creator and creation is maintained throughout. This distinguishes Islamic environmental ethics both from Emersonian transcendentalism, which blurs that distinction, and from certain forms of deep ecology that treat nature as the ultimate value. In Islam, the ultimate value is God; nature is valuable because God created it, sustains it, and has appointed humans as its stewards.

Conclusion

This article has compared Prophet Muhammad's teachings on nature with those of Ralph Waldo Emerson, addressing a significant gap in the comparative literature on religion, philosophy, and environmental ethics. Three main findings emerge from this analysis, and each has implications for how we understand both thinkers and how we approach contemporary environmental challenges.

The first finding is that Muhammad and Emerson share a fundamental recognition that nature possesses intrinsic spiritual significance and that contemplative engagement with nature deepens one's connection to the divine—or, in Emerson's case, to the Universal Being. Neither thinker reduces nature to mere resource; both insist that the natural world rewards attention that goes beyond calculation of material benefit. This shared recognition is not trivial. In an era when instrumental rationality dominates public discourse and nature is increasingly valued only insofar as it provides ecosystem services or economic benefits, the reminder that nature has value beyond utility is both countercultural and urgently necessary.

The second finding is that the underlying metaphysical frameworks of the two thinkers diverge irreducibly. Muhammad operates within a revelatory, theocentric framework where nature consists of divine signs pointing to a transcendent Creator who is utterly distinct from creation. Emerson operates within an intuitive, pantheistic-leaning framework where nature directly participates in the divine and the boundaries between self, nature, and God dissolve in moments of authentic perception. These differences are not merely semantic or theological; they reflect incompatible claims about the nature of reality, the source of moral authority, and the relationship between humanity and the cosmos. No amount of comparative analysis can

reconcile these frameworks, nor should it try. The goal of comparison is understanding, not synthesis.

The third finding is that despite these deep metaphysical disagreements, the practical environmental ethics derived from both frameworks overlap significantly. Both advocate conservation of resources. Both oppose waste. Both encourage attentive, humble engagement with the natural world. Both recognize that other creatures have claims on human attention and compassion. This overlap suggests that shared practical environmental commitments are possible even among those who hold incompatible worldviews. A Muslim conserving water because God commands it and a transcendentalist conserving water because nature is sacred may not agree on why water matters, but they can agree that it does matter and act accordingly together.

These findings carry implications for contemporary environmental ethics. First, religious environmentalism and secular or spiritual-but-not-religious environmentalism need not be in conflict. They can cooperate on practical projects while maintaining honest acknowledgment of their differences. Second, the study of comparative environmental ethics benefits from attention to both primary sources and secondary interpretations; too much contemporary writing relies on anthologies and summaries rather than engaging directly with foundational texts. Third, the differences between frameworks should not be papered over in the interest of finding consensus. The Muslim view that nature reflects but does not contain the divine, and the Emersonian view that nature participates in the divine, are genuinely different. Recognizing that difference is a form of intellectual honesty that makes cooperation more, not less, sustainable over the long term.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged, and these point toward directions for further research. First, this article focused on Shia hadith sources to address the reviewer's specific concern about primary Shia sources. A more complete study would also examine Sunni collections systematically, including Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, and the Sunan of Abu Dawud, Ibn Majah, al-Tirmidhi, and al-Nasa'i. While the traditions cited here appear in both Sunni and Shia collections, a comprehensive comparison would require explicit attention to the differences between the two major Islamic traditions. Second, the question of how Emerson actually encountered Islamic thought, whether through translations of Persian poetry, through German Romantic philosophy, or through other channels, remains unexplored and merits further investigation. Third, the reception of both Muhammad and Emerson in contemporary environmental movements would be a valuable subject for empirical research. How do Muslim environmental activists actually use prophetic traditions? How do readers of Emerson actually apply his philosophy to ecological problems?

A final reflection on the relationship between the two visions may be offered. The original title of this article spoke of "the harmonious vision of nature" as if Muhammad and Emerson shared a single vision. The analysis above has shown that this is not accurate. There is no single harmonious vision that both figures share. Instead, there are two distinct visions that happen to issue in similar practical recommendations. The Muslim vision is theocentric, communal, prescriptive, and grounded in divine revelation. The Emersonian vision is intuitive, individual, descriptive, and grounded in personal experience. They are not the same, and pretending they are the same would be a disservice to both. Yet they are not utterly incompatible either; they can coexist, learn from each other, and cooperate in practice. That is the proper outcome of comparative analysis: not forced harmony, but clarified difference that enables genuine dialogue. The cave where Muhammad received revelation and the forest where Emerson became a transparent eyeball are not the same place, but they belong to the same created world. Respecting that world requires understanding both.

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