

Title: Prepared Remarks for 'Harmony, Morality and the Environmental Crisis'

My name is Ibrahim Salih Abdul-Matin.

I am the author of Green Deen: What Islam Teaches About Protecting the Planet

Living a Green Deen means understanding that everything comes from Allah. We recognize that Allah is the Creator and sustainer of everything.

Living a Green Deen means seeing everything in the natural world as a sign (*ayat*) of our Creator.

Living a Green Deen means understanding that God created us directly from the Earth and that we must do all that we can to take care of it, protect it, and manage all of its bounty in a sustainable way.

Following a Green Deen means knowing that we are entrusted by God to act as stewards of the Earth. This trust is a promise to protect the planet, and it comes with the gifts of speech, knowledge, and the freedom to make decisions. God has given us the ability to make decisions over the land and the animals, and He trusts us to be responsible with this gift. We can choose to cooperate with nature—or not. We can choose to be inspired or burdened by this trust with Allah. Either way, we will be held accountable for our actions.

Those seeking to live a Green Deen should understand that communities without control of political and economic power often suffer disproportionately the negative effects of environmental pollution and environmental degradation.

Living a Green Deen means knowing that everything in creation is made to exist in a perfect balance (*mizan*).

A Green Deen starts with self-reflection. We need to “get right” within ourselves in order to treat the Earth as the sacred place that it is.

In my current role

I serve as the Director of Community Affairs at NYC’s Department of Environmental Protection – we manage the City’s water supply and waste water infrastructure. I like to say we are **Ensuring free access to clean water, Transforming waste management, and Making governments more responsive to citizens.**

I should also add that I am on the board of the Living Future Institute which has created building and product standards that are helping people renegotiate their relationship with the earth

I am a son, an older sibling, a younger sibling, the second child of six a former American football player and I am a husband a the father of three boys under 6. If you met me in the summer of 1999 I would have said "I'm a poet".

What I primarily do for work is operate as a translator. I make sure that regular people understand what the planners, architects, and engineers at NYC's DEP do to maintain one of the most astonishing water supply and removal systems in the world. In my career I have consistently been in this "translator" role. I hope that my experience is useful for today's discussion on faith.

In the past I have also been an educator. In 2000 I lead week-long outward bound expeditions for Boston middle school students on an island in Boston harbor called Thompson island. In 2002 I was part of a group which included Brooklyn's Prospect park and the Botanic Garden which conceived and started the Brooklyn Academy for Science and the Environment.

I share all this so that you know that I am passionate about the topics and the issues that you will be exploring

And to you...

First I must acknowledge that I am a creation of the creator of the universe. It is my understanding, as a Muslim, that the creator of the universe created all of our souls long before and that there was a time and a place in that long before where some of us, as souls, became acquainted with one another.

Being "soulmates" need not be as serious as we think of the idea of soulmates.

I would hope that the noble purpose for which we have been gathered here would qualify us all as "soulmates" of sorts.

Perhaps in that gathering of souls before the Creator put us into these bodies, we were all actually in community as well. Perhaps we sat in a similar setting and discussed what it means to be in harmony – and to be our best.

So I am approaching this conversation as if we are already relatives and neighbors and we have managed to arrive once again, together.

What impacts our ability to live in harmony?

One important factor is increased urbanization. Lots of different factors have been driving people into urban settings for thousands of years. But right now it is at a whole different scale. The City is the Way we live in a lot of the world.

It is safe to say that Climate Change is changing the way that we manage our resources.

And if you don't like to say climate change then we can talk about the impacts of days over 90 degrees, sea level rise, increased intensity of storms, soil erosion,

We normally talk about this in terms of resources and scarcity. I will veer away from that for a moment. And apply a lens from Google's Sidewalk Labs and think about this in terms of people and space or, density.

There are some costs and some benefits or rather, efficiencies to increasing density

As laid out by Rohit Aggarwala of Sidewalk Labs these are some of the efficiencies:

efficiencies:

- Density enables much **lower consumption of resources** and time.
- Density enables **higher asset utilization**.
- Density entails **frequent physical interactions**.

And there are some costs:

- Density leads to a reliance on **central systems**.
- Density increases the need for **courtesy and trust**.
- Density requires **coordination and negotiation**.

Our Shared Story

Humans usually develop a shared story to understand moments.

Right now we are in a time when religion, science, and the theater of politics all have a similar narrative;

Whether it is about climate change, the threats of increasingly polarized and extreme politics, or talk of the "end times" we all seem to be speaking about the end of the world.

Transitions

Perhaps this shared narrative is something so dramatic that the only words we have for it are about the end of things.

Perhaps it is the end of one thing...

I am part of a community of thinkers that sees this moment as a period of transition

And a time to:

**nurture whole people and whole communities
to transition from a world of domination and extraction to a world of
regeneration, resilience, and interdependence.**

I talk about an aspect of this in Green Deen:

On September 27, 2008, over fifty thousand Americans in seven hundred communities across the fifty United States stood up and said, "America is ready to build the new economy. We're ready to save people and the planet. We're ready for green jobs now!" One of those seven hundred communities was the Anacostia community outside of Washington, DC. At the Anacostia Green Jobs Now rally, Mike Tidwell, director of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network, noticed he was speaking on the lawn of a church and said, "We need to get our energy from heaven, wind, solar, and waves, instead of from hell—the stuff in the ground like coal, oil, and gas." Extraction causes imbalance, whereas energy from above is like a gift from heaven.

Energy from hell is energy that is derived from the ground. It is extracted from the Earth, it is dirty, and it is a major cause of pollution and climate change. Energy from hell is nonrenewable; it takes away from the Earth without giving back. It disturbs the balance (*mizan*) of the universe and is therefore a great injustice (*zulm*). A Green Deen calls for maintaining the Earth's balance and treating it justly.

The Quran guides us to use the power of the wind and the sun

this narrative of transition is not about destroying the way we live now totally. It simply means finding the best ways to solve persistent human problems of how to provide heat, find clean water, manage our human waste streams, protect the natural world around us, and feed and be in some partnership with the earth to produce what we need to flourish.

Extraction is about raping and pillaging and leaving the earth barren

Regeneration is about making deserts and war torn and ravaged land bloom again

Regeneration is about permaculture

Extraction is about the past

Healing scarred land is the path of the future and it is what we are transitioning towards.

What is the role of the faith community?

In this moment of transition from extraction to regeneration what is the role of faith leaders, of religious communities, the faithful, etc.?

Back in Brooklyn, where I am from, we have a way of being in space together... it is really an island culture so people talk freely, and openly in the streets, we have this perspective that “we are in this together”

That was really clear in 2003 when the northeast suffered a blackout.

During the 2003 blackout, I thought about how people look to their faith traditions for answers in times of uncertainty and seek solace in meditation or prayer. I wondered what would it look like if during a blackout, all the houses of worship across the Northeast—churches, temples, synagogues, and mosques—were shining beacons of light in a sea of darkness

What else ... ?

Our faiths transcend borders in a good way.

Because in this period of transition we have to think differently.

It is time to think less about the borders we have made and more about the watersheds, foodsheds, and the ecosystems that sustain life

If you are a religious leader...

As we are making this transition, you have to accept that people may not listen to you.

Our prophetic traditions have trained you for this

Think about the stories and know that sometimes the people do not listen.

But they will be paying attention!

The faith community has to lead by example.

We have to practice what we preach.

What this looks like:

Religious institutions can fill gaps to aid us in this transition:

Supporting research

For example -- universities traditionally funded good ideas. However, today, many are trying to "take ownership" of ideas generated on their campuses. Additionally, corporate research is myopically focused on ideas that produce profit, as opposed to ideas which are more about regeneration than extraction

Maybe it is time for religious institutions to become the place where innovation happens towards persistent human problems...?

Rethinking Waste:

How do we know so much about the supply chain and know so little about the removal chain? There is value in our waste stream that we have simply overlooked in our rush to burn, scrap, and throw trash "away." Innovations in waste management can be as simple as making a goal to reduce waste altogether. The state of Sharjah in the UAE has made this a priority and Bee'ah Environmental is the company leading waste reduction efforts.

Religious institutions, in mostly urban areas, should be the best neighbors and model best practice.

New models

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

In basic terms, CSA consists of a community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation so that the farmland becomes, either legally or spiritually, the community's farm, with the growers and consumers providing mutual support and sharing the risks and benefits of food production. Typically, members or "shareholders" of the farm or garden pledge in advance to cover the anticipated costs of the farm operation and farmer's salary. In return, they receive shares in the farm's bounty throughout the growing season.

Now lets roll up our sleeves and get back to work.