

Qur'an Creation & Conservation

An introduction to the ethical foundations
of
Islamic environmentalism

Devised and written by

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah the Beneficial the Merciful

Introduction

Words and Meanings

The term "conservation" as it is understood today is relatively new in its usage. It emerged out of necessity in the latter part of the twentieth century as the effects of human behaviour increasingly began to negatively impact on the environment. This also brought about a realisation that the entity we describe as the "environment" is at the receiving end of processes known as 'pollution, degradation and deforestation'. The environment also has other names that can be substituted in its place like nature, the natural order, the primordial pattern, the original state and so on. Each of these terms may be seen as abstractions used to describe collectively the elements, the flora, the fauna and their interactions and interdependence on each other. We, the human community, are of course intrinsically interwoven into its fabric. The term the Qur'an uses to describe the environment or nature, etc. Is "creation" (*khalq*). This word is derived from the root *Kh L Q* in Arabic and there are estimated to be 261 verses in the Qur'an, which are derived from this root in its various grammatical forms. The very first revelation of the Qur'an contains the verb *khalaq* (created) derived from this root. This verse is translated thus: "Read in the name of your Lord Who created" (96:1). The clear implication here is that we are part of the totality of the creational process the responsibility for which has been Allah's. The Qur'an is then a manual of life transactions for the human community on how to conduct itself in creation. At one level it is about conserving the body and the soul, at another it is about the forests and the rivers and at yet another level it is about the communities of beings that fly and crawl and lope and swim. The body of teaching in the Qur'an that deals with these matters may be described as *'Ilm ul Khalq* (Knowledge of Creation) which predates the science of Ecology by fourteen centuries.

The Images

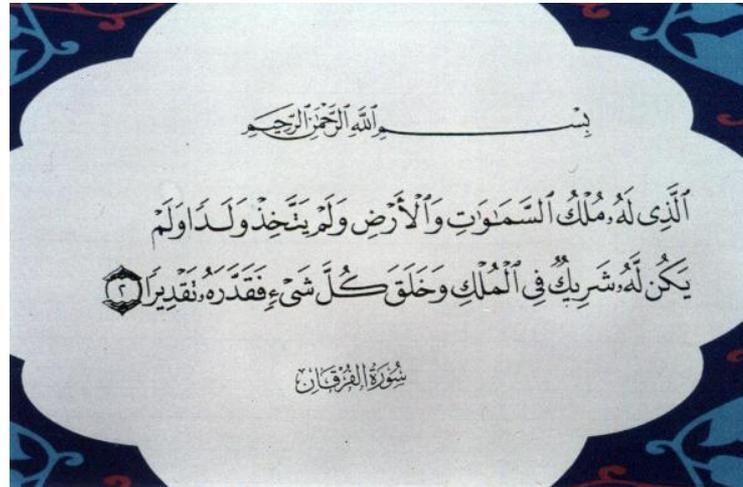
The twenty-four images that form this teaching resource are divided, into three parts. Images 1 to 12 are mainly descriptive in nature and attempt to draw out the themes from the Qur'an on Creation itself - the cosmos, the flora, the fauna and the human community. In following the ethos of the Qur'an they attempt to show that each element in creation has a role of its own and in playing this role it helps the others to play their part. The human community is endowed with the status of guardianship and is thus placed in the role of conserver. Images 13 - 18 form the second part and an attempt is made here to draw lessons from the Qur'an on human behaviour and its corrosive effects on the environment. The final section - images 19 - 24 - describes the balance that exists in the natural order and how tentative steps are being taken by many individuals and groups in various parts of the world to put things right. The concluding image summarises the role of the human species in its relationship with the rest of creation. It stresses the conscious striving that is needed by us to preserve the natural world as if it were our only home.

SECTION ONE: CREATION



1. PLANET EARTH

SECTION ONE: CREATION



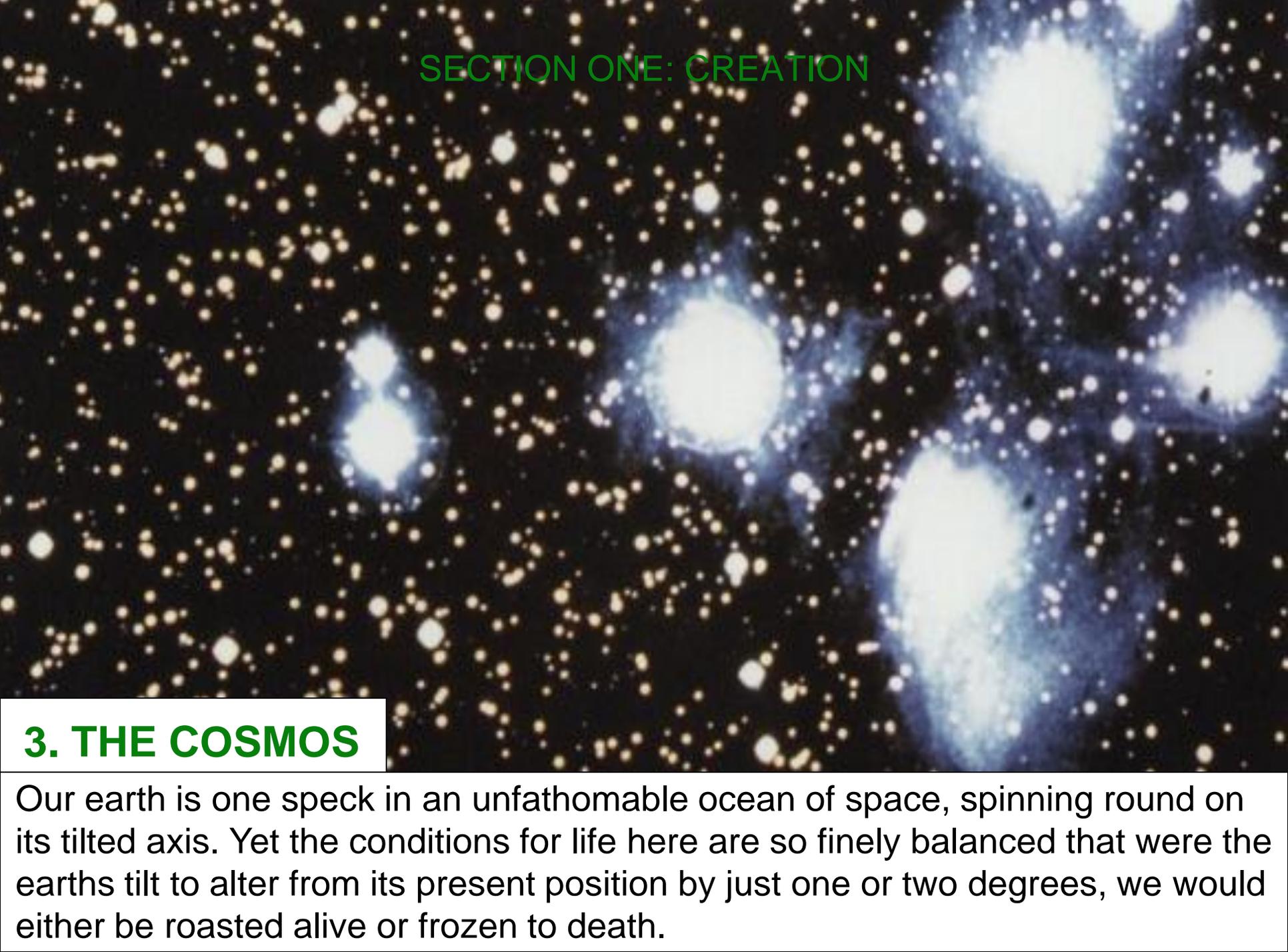
2. CREATION

...(He) to Whom belongs the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth; and He has not taken to Him a son, and He has no associate in the Kingdom; and He created everything, and then He ordained it very exactly.

Qur'an 25:2

The laws of creation include the elements of order, balance and proportion. Everything is limited in space and time and scientific techniques enable us to measure much of what we experience both in their static and dynamic states. However, we may think that we know a great deal through the advance of science but we still understand very little of the totality of creation.

SECTION ONE: CREATION



3. THE COSMOS

Our earth is one speck in an unfathomable ocean of space, spinning round on its tilted axis. Yet the conditions for life here are so finely balanced that were the earth's tilt to alter from its present position by just one or two degrees, we would either be roasted alive or frozen to death.

A photograph of a lush tropical forest. Sunlight filters through the dense canopy of green leaves, creating a dappled light effect. Several tree trunks are visible, some with moss or lichen growing on them. The overall scene is vibrant and verdant.

SECTION ONE: CREATION

4. TROPICAL FOREST

Forests are an essential part of our planet's regulatory and supply system. They collect the water that forms rivers; control climate by generating moisture and absorbing solar radiation; prevent erosion by locking the soil together and act as host to millions of animal and vegetable species.

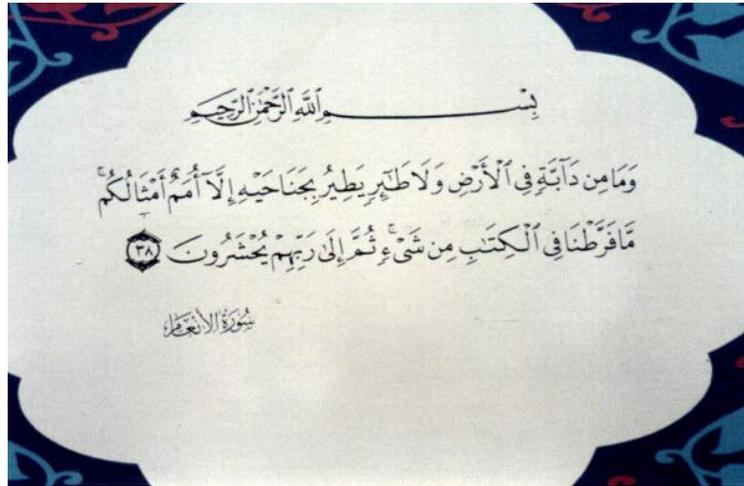
SECTION ONE: CREATION



5. THE ROSY PERIWINKLE

Everything has a purpose and there are in the storehouse of creation gifts we have yet to receive. Over time we have discovered many trees and plants that are of great benefit to us, such as the Rosy Periwinkle which is the original source of the drug which cures leukaemia.

SECTION ONE: CREATION



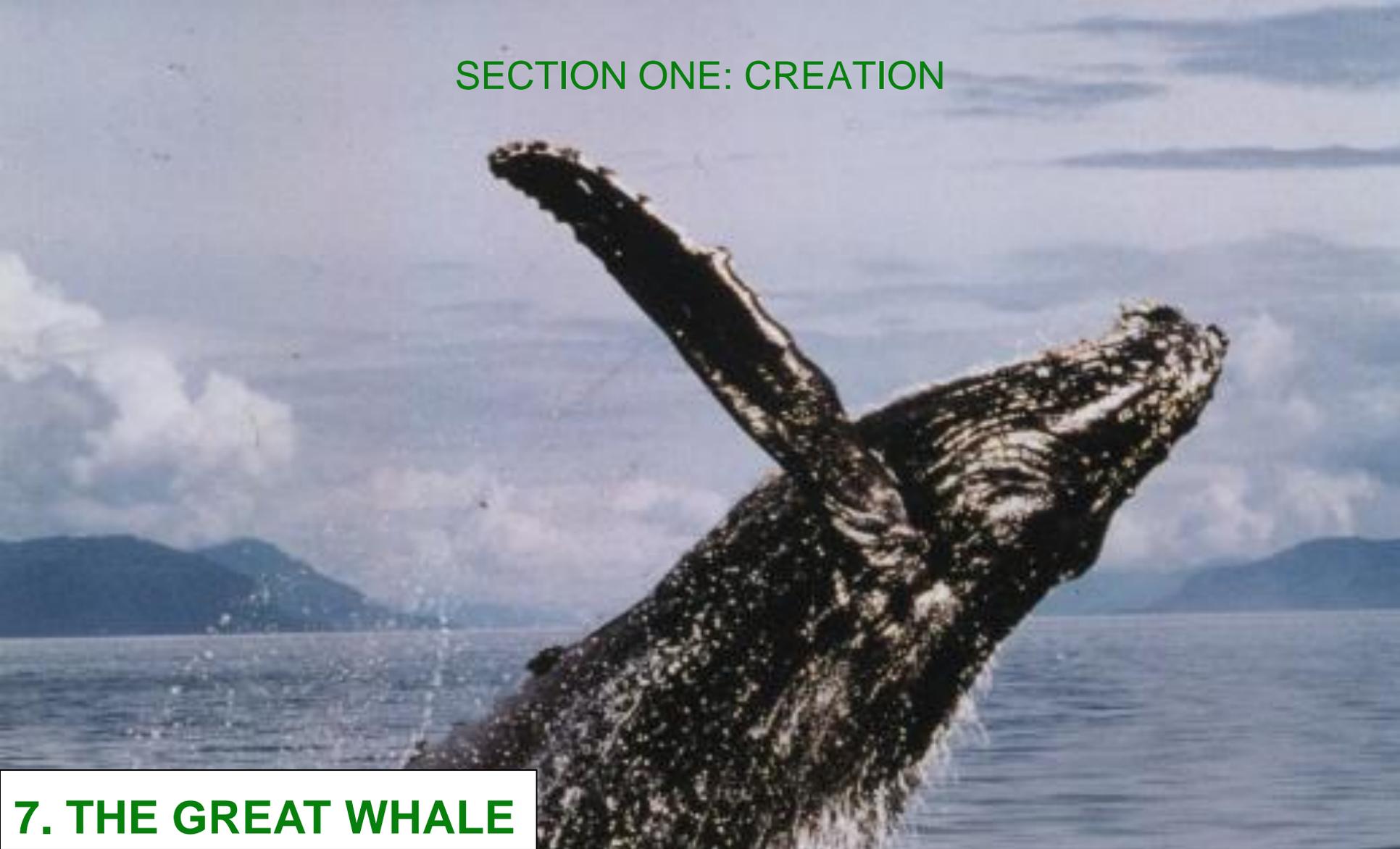
6. COMMUNITIES IN CREATION

No creature is there crawling on the earth, no bird flying with its wings, but they are nations like unto yourselves. We have neglected nothing in the Book; then to their Lord they shall be mustered.

Qur'an 6:38

Every living creature is part of a community. The great whales that plough through the oceans, the elephants of the tropical forests and the ants and the bees are examples of creatures forming complex, efficient, multi-generational communities.

SECTION ONE: CREATION



7. THE GREAT WHALE

Whales live in families that form sophisticated societies. They play in the moonlight, they talk to one another and they care for each other in distress. The whale is the largest Living creature that Allah has put on this earth.

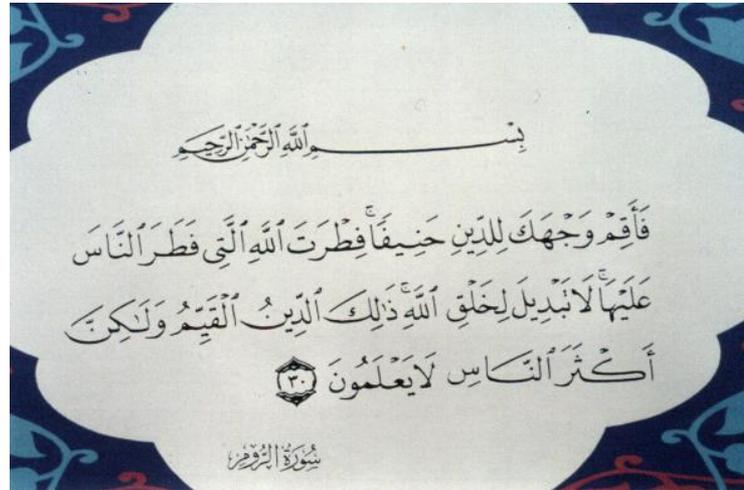
SECTION ONE: CREATION



8. TINY INSECT

The tropical forests alone may well contain thirty million different species of insect - that is over ninety per cent of all the earth's species. Many kinds of insects have yet to be discovered and their contribution to maintaining the balance of the earth's eco-system is still unknown.

SECTION ONE: CREATION



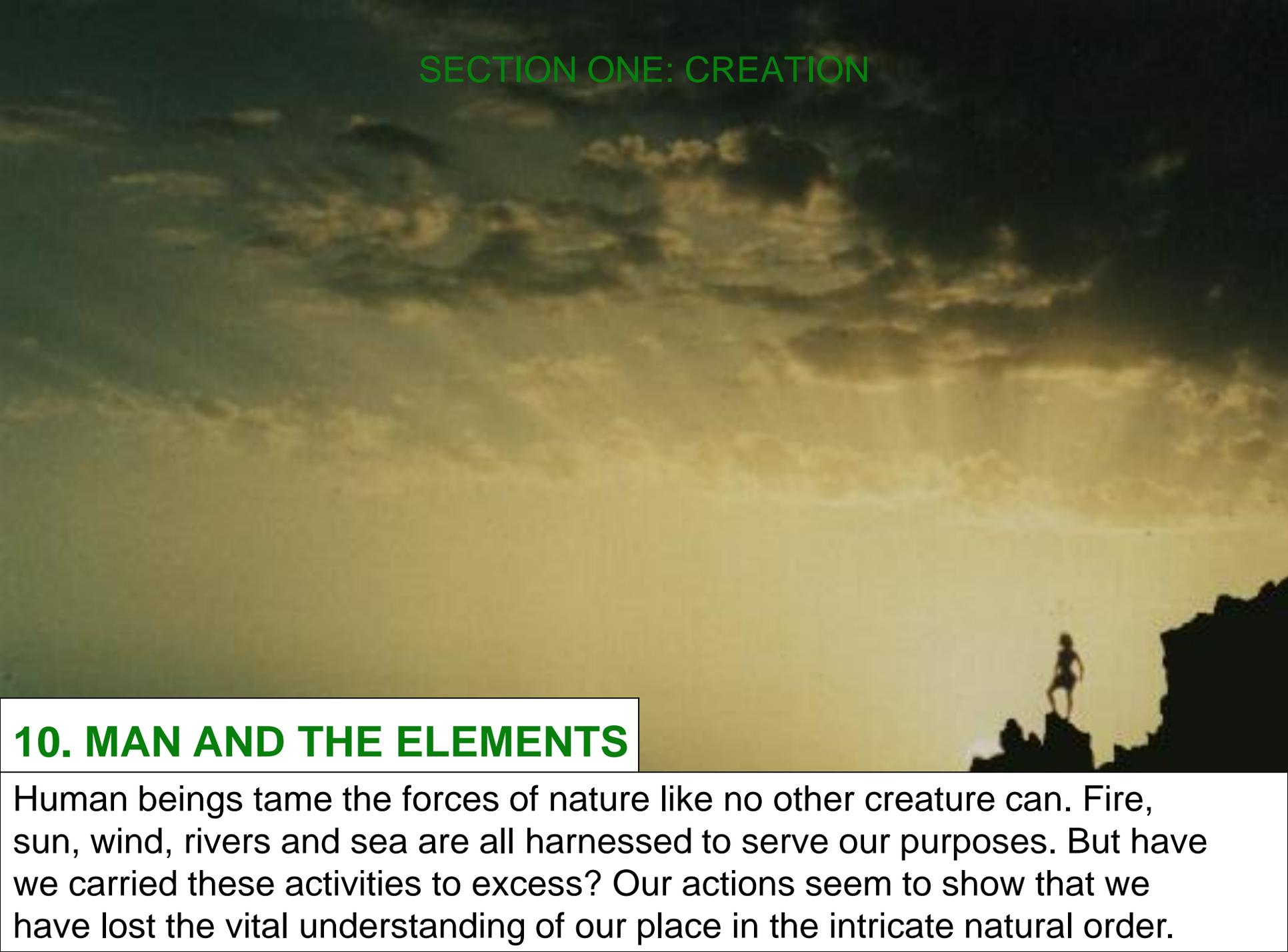
9. ORIGINAL CREATION

So set thy face to the religion, a man of pure faith - Allah's original upon which He originated humankind. There is no changing Allah's creation. That is the true religion; but most people do not know.

Qur'an 30:29

Allah originated creation and then created humankind within it. We were then subjected to Allah's unchangeable laws as was the rest of creation, making us – at the biological level – equal partners with the rest of nature.

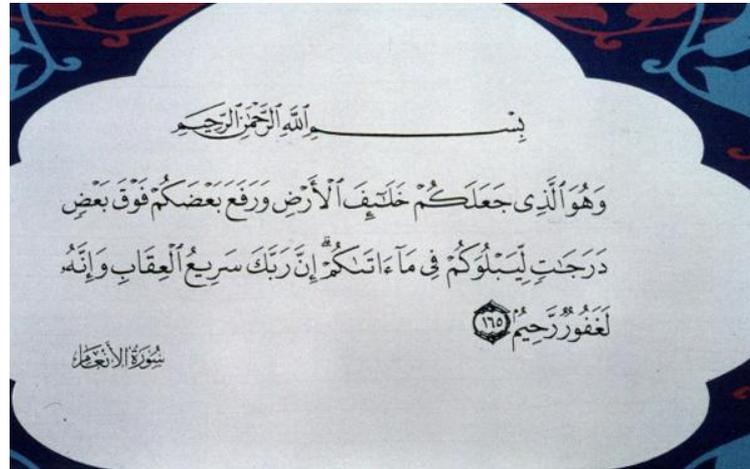
SECTION ONE: CREATION



10. MAN AND THE ELEMENTS

Human beings tame the forces of nature like no other creature can. Fire, sun, wind, rivers and sea are all harnessed to serve our purposes. But have we carried these activities to excess? Our actions seem to show that we have lost the vital understanding of our place in the intricate natural order.

SECTION ONE: CREATION



11. GUARDIANS OF THE EARTH

It is He who has appointed you guardians in the earth, and has raised some of you in rank above others, the He may try you in what He has given you. Surely your Lord is swift in reckoning; and surely He is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate.

Qur'an 6:165

Khalifa or the role of guardianship is the sacred duty Allah has imposed upon the human race. We are a lot more than friends of the earth - we are its guardians. This responsibility comes from the fact that unlike any other sentient being we have been given the privilege of being able to reason and thus be ultimately accountable for our actions.

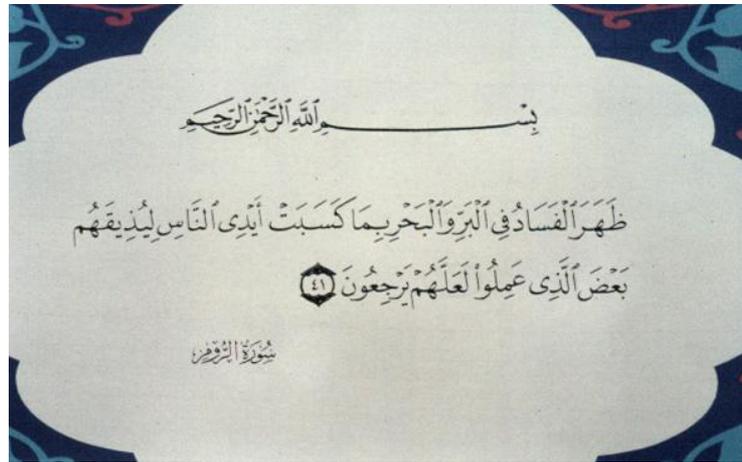
SECTION ONE: CREATION



12. THE HUMAN FAMILY

For thousands of years the people who really understood nature have been those who live closest to it. Nomadic tribes, like the Tuareg who traverse the desert, still provide us with examples of lifestyle that exist in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

SECTION TWO: CORRUPTION



13. POLLUTION AND HUMAN ACTIVITY

Corruption has appeared in the land and sea for that men's own hands have earned, that Allah may let them taste some part of what they have done, so that they may return to their senses.

Qur'an 30:40

Everything now points to the fact that humankind has neglected its responsibilities as khalifa in the way it is destroying the natural world. Scientists are confirming that our actions have induced global warming and climate change, which is disrupting the very patterning of Allah's creation that has uniquely endowed planet earth with a climate suited to the propagation and sustenance of life.

A photograph showing a forest fire. Thick, grey smoke rises from the ground, partially obscuring the trees. In the lower right corner, bright orange and yellow flames are visible, consuming some of the forest floor. The overall scene is hazy and somber, illustrating the destruction of a forest.

SECTION TWO: CORRUPTION

14. BURNING FOREST

We keep cutting down and setting fire to our beautiful forests in the name of human consumption. Trees occupying an area the size of a football pitch crash to the ground every second. We ignore at our peril their vital role in ensuring the survival of all living things on earth.

SECTION TWO: CORRUPTION



15. (a) ATMOSPHERIC POLLUTION (B) ACID RAIN DAMAGE

The high consumption of energy demanded by modern lifestyles produces millions of tons of pollutants each day. Poisons in the air not only constitute a serious health hazard to all who breathe them, but fall as acid rain devastating life in the forests, mountains, lakes and rivers.

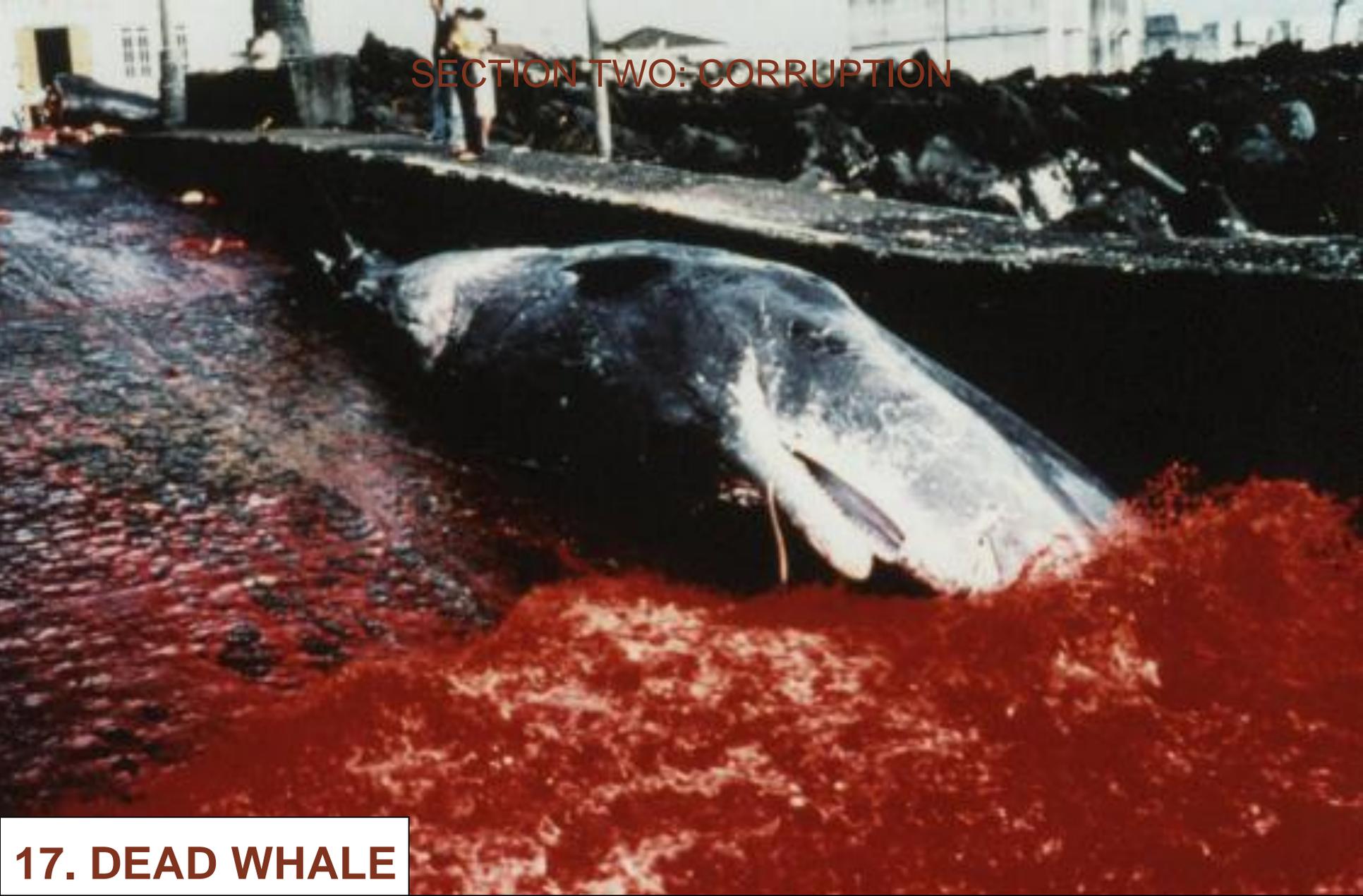
SECTION TWO: CORRUPTION



16. (a) EFFLUENT WATER BORNE POLLUTION (B) EROSION SOIL DAMAGE

Waste water containing a lethal mixture of viruses, bacteria, chemicals, metals and oils is being dumped daily into the seas. This is a serious health hazard to every living thing that comes into contact with it - including ourselves. When the forests are cut down, top soil once held together by tree roots is eroded and carried downstream in rivers, choking aquatic life and spoiling water.

SECTION TWO: CORRUPTION



17. DEAD WHALE

The increasingly extravagant life styles and the growth of human population are bringing a whole range of our fellow species to near or total extinction.

SECTION TWO: CORRUPTION



18. EXTINCTION CLOCK

If the total period of life on this planet is compared to a single year the human species has existed on it for less than twelve hours on the final day. In the brief time we have spent on this earth we are causing the extinction of species that have lived on this planet far longer than us. It is not far-fetched to say that we are also creating conditions that put the survival of the human species itself at great risk.

SECTION THREE: BALANCE



19. THE BALANCE

The All Merciful has taught the Qur'an. He created man and taught him the Explanation. The sun and the moon to a reckoning, and the stars and the trees bow themselves; and heaven - He raised it up and set the Balance.

Qur'an 55:1-7

There is an inherent balance and tendency towards stability in the natural order. This is another way of saying that the whole of creation is in submission to One Creator. Therefore as Allah's khalifa on earth we have a responsibility to behave justly, actively acknowledging the balance and order that surrounds us and doing everything possible to keep it that way.

SECTION THREE: BALANCE



20. INDIAN TIGER

We can all play a part in protecting endangered species such as this awesome Indian tiger. Conservation schemes to protect animals such as the American Bison, Green Turtle and Arabian Oryx are happily proving successful.

SECTION THREE: BALANCE



21. FOREST NURSERY

Forests worldwide absorb millions of tons of carbon dioxide being spewed into the atmosphere by cars and industry. Many countries are implementing reforestation programmes to help ensure the carbon cycle is kept in balance, but they have a long way to go before they reach the stage when more trees are planted than are being cut down.

SECTION THREE: BALANCE



22. ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF POWER

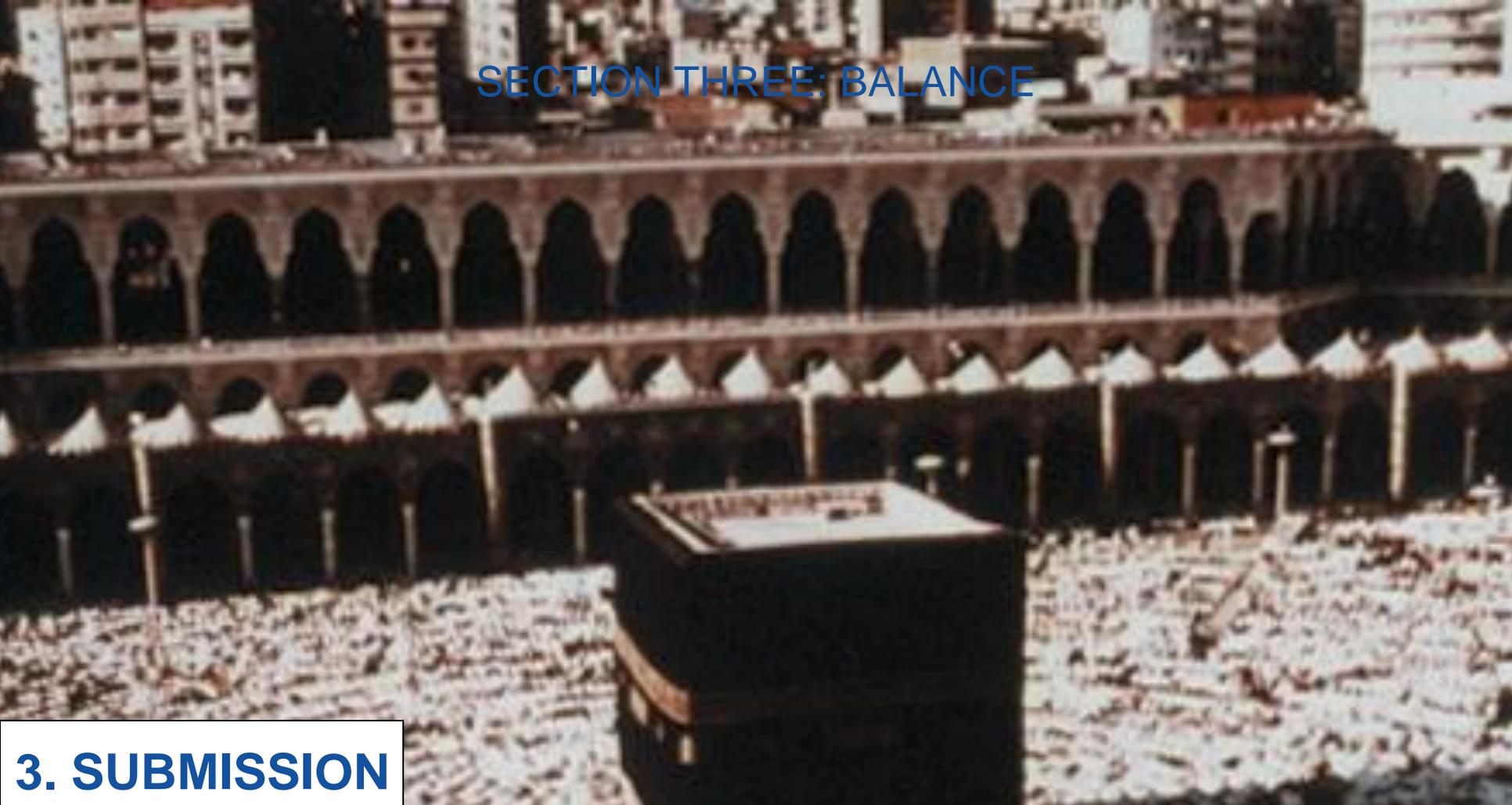
Energy from the sun, the tides and the wind can be harnessed, causing none of the pollution produced by the extraction and use of fossil fuels. Windmills, for example, can be used for pumping water for irrigation and generating electricity.

SECTION THREE: BALANCE

A large flock of birds, possibly terns, is captured in mid-flight over a body of water. The birds are scattered across the sky, with some in the foreground and others further back. The water is dark blue, and a forested mountain rises in the background under a clear sky.

3. THE NATURAL ORDER

Planet earth is unique. Nothing comparable to its self-organising, self-adjusting and self-replenishing eco-systems has been discovered in the whole of the known universe.



SECTION THREE: BALANCE

3. SUBMISSION

The whole of creation works because it follows the laws of the Creator. The only creature that can act contrary to its pre-ordained patterning and upset the balance is the human being. When we pray and place our foreheads on the earth in obedience to the Creator it reminds us that in the end, maintaining the balance of creation requires continuous awareness of the work and the will of Allah.

Note on References from the Qur'an

The references to the Qur'an in English in this resource are from the translation by A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, Oxford Paperbacks, World Classics series.

The Qur'an is considered to be untranslatable in its pure form into any other language from the original Arabic. For this reason it is suggested that it would be advantageous to have recourse to other popularly available translations in English to bring the meaning as near as possible to the sense of the original. A short list of the translators of the more accessible versions is Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Asad, N J Dawood and Marmaduke Pickthall. Further assistance is also now available from the compendious nine volume translation and exegesis of the Qur'an by Al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan produced under the auspices of the Islamic University, Al-Madina Al-Munawwara. The following two recent translations by Abdalhaqq and Aisha Bewley and M.A.S. Abdel Haleem are also recommended. A serious study of the Qur'an will of course necessitate a working knowledge of Arabic.

Photographic Credits

1. Qur'an Creation & Conservation (Earth from Space) - ICCE / NASA
2. Creation - Qur'an Verse - IFEES
3. The Cosmos - Islamic Foundation
4. Tropical Forest (Tropical forest, Sao Tome) - Philip Steele / ICCE
5. The Rosy Periwinkle - Philip Steele / ICCE
6. Communities in Creation - Qur'an Verse - IFEES
7. The Great Whale (Humpback Whale breaching) - Environmental Images
8. Tiny Insect (Shield Bug, Peru) - Ken Preston-Mafham Premaphotos Wildlife
9. Original Creation - Qur'an Verse - IFEES
10. Man and the Elements (Sunrise) - ICCE / RCA
11. Guardians of the Earth - Qur'an Verse - IFEES
12. The Family of Man (WWF Project Guide, Niger) - J. Grettenberger/ WWF International
13. Pollution & Human activity - Qur'an Verse - IFEES
14. Burning Forest (Deforestation, Amazon Brazil) - Environmental Images
- 15a. Atmospheric Pollution (Air Pollution, UK) - Nigel Dudley / ICCE
- 15b. Acid Rain Damage (Acid Rain Damage, Sweden) - C. Agren / ICCE
- 16a. Effluent - Water Bourne Pollution (Outflow pipe - Cumbria) - Philip Steele / ICCE
- 16b. Erosion - Soil Damage (Soil Erosion, Kenya) - Mark Boulton / ICCE
17. Dead Whale (Whaling Station, Azores) - Paul Goriup / ICCE
18. Extinction Clock (Extinction clock' montage) - ICCE
19. The Balance - Qur'an Verse - IFEES
20. Indian Tiger - I.Ledgerwood / WWF UK
21. Forest Nursery (Forest nursery, Cameroon)
22. Alternative Sources of Power - a. Dutch Windmill, b. Cretan Windmill - Jill Matthews / ICCE
Rod James / NCAT
23. The Natural Order (Flamingos, Lake Nakuru, Kenya) - Mark Boulton / ICCE
24. Submission - Islamic Foundation