

Zakah and Social Solidarity

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Humans are social beings by nature. **They** cannot live in isolation; rather they are here on earth to coexist in one society where they **exchange ideas and benefit from one another**. Islam pays attention to human society and recognizes human rights. Allah the Almighty says, *“And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference,”* (the Quran, ۱۷: ۷۰)

Islam pays attention to the individual and the society in which the individuals live. Islam establishes the rules and standards that aim to produce solidarity at its best form **with due care for** the less-fortunate people. For example, Islam commands us to take care of the orphans and the needy **insomuch** that they can lead a secure and decent life. Every human has the right to live a life free of poverty and need. Islam imposes the religious duty of *zakah* whereby the rich pay amounts of their wealth in support of the poor and the needy.

Zakah is one of the fundamental principles of Islam. The Prophet (May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, *“Islam is built on five pillars: to profess Islamic faith, establish prayer, pay zakah, perform hajj, and fast Ramadan,”* (Al-Bukhari).

Zakah is obligatory, for Allah says, *“Establish prayer, give zakah and bow with those who bow [in worship and obedience],”* (the Quran, ۲: ۴۳). Allah also says, *“Give the zakah on crops on the day of harvest,”* (the Quran, ۶: ۱۴۱). Allah also says, *“Zakah recipients are only the poor and for the needy and for those employed for it ۴۰۰ and for bringing hearts together [for Islam] and for freeing captives [or slaves] and for those in debt and for the cause of Allah and for the [stranded] traveler – an obligation [imposed] by Allah. And Allah is Knowing and Wise,”* (the Quran, ۹: ۶۰).

Ibn ‘Abbas (May Allah be pleased with him) narrated that *when the Prophet (May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) appointed Mu`adh as the governor of Yemen, he gave him instructions saying, “You are going to govern a people who belong to the People of the Scripture (Christians and Jews). You first call them to believe in Allah as the only one God to be worshipped and in me as the messenger of Allah. If they obey you, then second you teach them that Allah the Almighty has prescribed five daily prayers upon them. If they comply, then third you tell them that Allah has made it obligatory on them to pay zakah; zakah is to be taken from the wealthy and given to the poor. If they listen to you, then when you collect zakah from the rich, do not take the best of what they own. You had better avoid injustice, since Allah the Almighty immediately attends to the prayer made by the oppressed.”*

Abu Hurayrah (May Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, *“There are two angels who descend to earth everyday and they pray to Allah saying, ‘O Allah! Bless the wealth of those who give in charity in Your Cause! O Allah! Give loss to those who do not give in charity!’”* (Al-Bukhari and Muslim).

Allah gives a great warning to those who do not observe the ritual of *zakah*. Allah the Almighty says, *“And those who hoard gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah – give them tidings of a painful punishment. The Day when it will be heated in the fire of Hell and seared therewith will be their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs, [it will be said], ‘This is what you hoarded for yourselves, so taste what you used to hoard,’”* (the Quran: ۹: ۳۴–۳۵). Allah **promises severe punishment** for any negligence in this regard.

In assertion of *zakah*'s paramount importance, Allah always associates it with the greatest ritual of Islam, i.e. prayer. Such association **aims to stress** the importance of *zakah*, encourage people to observe it, and warn them against its neglect. *Zakah* is given **various** names in the Quran; it is called spending, charity and *zakah*.

Allah says, *“And establish prayer and give zakah, and whatever good you put forward for yourselves – you will find it with Allah. Indeed Allah, of what you do, is Seeing,”* (the Quran, ۲:۱۱۰) Allah also says, *“O Muhammad! Take from their wealth a charity by which you purify them*

and cause them increase, and invoke [Allah's blessings] upon them. Indeed, your invocations are reassurance for them. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing,” (the Quran, ۹: ۱۰۳)

Zakah's position in Islam is great. As mentioned, **it is a** fundamental principle that aims to achieve solidarity and harmony between the members of human society. Yet, *zakah* is not an optional ritual. It is a financial duty imposed on the rich to protect the marginalized and impoverished individuals.

The rationale behind *zakah* is that it purifies **human souls** and helps Muslims overcome greed and stinginess. **It also aims to** help those who are less fortunate in this **world**. *Zakah* brings back blessings on one's wealth; it protects money and provides insurance against unexpected failures. *Zakah* is not a tax **but an act of worship** that seeks to reinforce unity, love and sympathy **among** the members of the same community.

Uncovering the underlying reasons behind *zakah*, the Quran states: **“[O Muhammad,] Take from their wealth a charity by which you purify them and cause them increase, and invoke [Allah's blessings] upon them. Indeed, your invocations are reassurance for them. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing,”** (the Quran, ۹: ۱۰۳). Allah also says, **“And whoever is protected from the stinginess of his soul – it is those who will be the successful,”** (the Quran, ۵۹: ۹). The Prophet (May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) also said, **“Three qualities bring devastating losses to humans; they are overwhelming stinginess, obsessing desire for evil and self-conceit”** (Al-Bayhaqi).

As far as the poor are concerned, *zakah* is a great means for the purification of one's soul; **it** eliminates envy, grudge and other bad sentiments that a poor person may harbor against the rich in society. **Spiritual purification and social security** are the first and foremost goals of *zakah* or charity-giving. Charity is not necessarily materialized in material support; **kind treatment features another form of charity;** the Prophet (May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) says, **“To smile to a person is an act of charity. To promote that is good and prevent that is evil is an act of charity. To show a lost person the way is an act of charity. To lead a blind person somewhere is an act of charity. To remove harm from the environment is**

an act of charity. To be helpful to others is an act of charity,” (At-Tirmidhi).

Wonders of *zakah* never end as it actually causes one’s wealth to grow. Allah the Almighty says, *“But whatever thing you spend [in Allah’s cause] – Allah will compensate it; and He is the best of providers,”* (the Quran, ٣٤: ٣٩) The Prophet (May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) also promises, *“Charity never causes wealth to be diminished, forgiveness brings but dignity, and humility brings but high esteem in Allah’s sight,”* (Muslim).

Abu Hurayrah (May Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, *“Once, a man was in the desert, and he heard a voice coming from the sky. The voice was talking to a cloud saying, ‘Go and water the garden of so-and-so’. That cloud moved ahead and poured rain on the top of a high place that gradually slopes downwards. The man stood up and went to the place where the cloud poured the rain. He ended up in a garden where he saw a man collecting the water of the rain with a gardening tool. He said to him, ‘Excuse me! What is your name?’ The man of the garden said, ‘My name is So-and-so’, and the man’s name was that which was heard from the sky at the very beginning of the story. The man of the garden said to the first man, ‘Why are you asking?’ He replied, ‘I heard a voice from the sky commanding the cloud that poured the rain on your garden to move and water the garden of so-and-so’, and this so and so was your name. Could you please tell me what you do with your garden?’ The man of the garden said, ‘Since you asked, I will tell you. Whatever comes out of the garden, I give a third of the crops in charity and a third to my family and myself, and I invest the last third in the garden,”* (Muslim).

Zakah significantly uproots poverty and creates love and peace among the members of society. Allah the Almighty highly encourages Muslims to observe *zakah*; He praises those who pay charities and promises them success in this life and **in the Afterlife**. Allah the Almighty says, *“Certainly will the believers have succeeded; those who are during their prayer humbly submissive, turn away from ill speech, and are observant of *zakah*,”* (the Quran, ٢٣: ١–٤). **He also promises Paradise to the charitable people endowed with these merits; He (may He be Exalted) says, “Those are**

the inheritors who will inherit Paradise where they will abide therein eternally,” (the Quran, ۲۳: ۱۰-۱۱).

Over history, no human system pays due care for the value of charity-giving as Islam does in *zakah*. The teachings of Allah and His Prophet obviously show how Islam seeks to spread good and peace and eliminate evil and misery. Islam seeks to **create** a smile on everybody’s face. *Zakah* is established to secure a good life for everyone, since it mainly seeks to build a strong system of solidarity and unity. These are the values of Islam. Allah the Almighty says, *“Cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty,”* (the Quran, ۹: ۲). In his commentary on the Quran, Imam Al-Qurtubi maintains that this verse commands all humans to work hand in hand for the **welfare** of human society. Allah commands us to work together to achieve all that is good and He associates goodness with piety. It **indirectly** reveals that when you work for the **welfare** of people you are indeed working for the sake of Allah. Such is the real happiness when a person does that is good in the sight of Allah and that is good in the sight of people as well.

Allah the Almighty says, *“Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets and gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, wayfarers, those who ask [for help], and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer and gives zakah; [those who] fulfill their promises when they promise; and [those who] are patient in poverty and hardship and during wartimes. Those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who are the righteous,”* (the Quran, ۲: ۱۷۷).

The aforementioned texts urge the wealthy to give charities and **constantly extend help to the orphans, the poor and all those in need of help**. Actually, many people may need help and keep waiting for hands to relieve them from the darkness of need and wrap them in love and compassion.

The texts also explain that when the wealthy give charities, they **fulfill** the mission of Islam and create social security and stability among the individuals of their respective communities. It is through *zakah* that people can live in sustainable peace and prosperity under **the** Islamic faith and noble teachings.

Islam commands Muslims to be compassionate to one another, sympathize with the hard conditions of one another, and help one another at times of need. Muslims stand as one building whose bricks are strongly connected to one another. The Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) says, *“Muslims stand as one building whose bricks hold it strong,”* (Al-Bukhari). In another narration, the Prophet (May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) describes all believers as one body in the sense that if one part of the body is in pain, the rest parts suffer pain as well. The Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) says, *“The believers in their love and compassion to one another are like one body in which if a limb is afflicted with a disease then the whole body will go through sleeplessness and fever,”* (Muslim).

Abu Sa'īd Al-Khudri said, “We were on a trip with the Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him). One man came over on a camel; he kept hanging around us and he was looking around. The Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) had the sense that the man might have been in need of something. He (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said to the Companions, *“If any of you has an extra riding animal, so he should give it away to somebody who does not have one. And, if any of you has extra food, so he should give it away to somebody who does not have any.”* (Muslim)

All these teachings urge us to show mercy and love to one another, and emphasize the virtue of giving charities as much as we can. These teachings highlight the Prophet's aim to establish a society inspired by love, coexistence, solidarity and sincerity. The Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) succeeded in establishing a society that featured all these qualities. This can be projected back to the early generations of Islam who sincerely followed the Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) in all that which he commanded.

Solidarity is not necessarily concerned with financial assets, even though the financial element is so essential. Solidarity means sympathy that extends to every single individual in society. Solidarity is to help the needy satisfy their needs and to respect the human right to live a decent life in sufficiency and security.

The Islamic teachings stress solidarity in the broad sense of the word. Therefore, the **Muslim** society is supposed to be free of selfishness and passivity and to reinforce love, fraternity and cooperation. In Islam, solidarity seeks to build up a strongly united society that is based on love, benevolence and moral order. **Conversely, when an individual feels insecure and the society fails to meet their needs,** they will start harboring envy, grudge and hatred in their hearts against others. The Islamic system of solidarity aims to provide every single person with a decent life without **the least violation of others' rights.** Contemplating these facts unveils the role of *zakah* as an essential element for the achievement of human security, stability and unity.