

Fast 20: Charity — Its recipients

- The circle of those towards whom an act of charity may be done is as wide as can be imagined. The Holy Prophet said:

“Whatever you feed yourself with is a charity, and whatever you feed your children with is a charity, and whatever you feed your wife with is a charity, and whatever you feed your servant with is a charity.” (*Musnad Ahmad*)

“Whoever tills a field and birds and beasts eat of it, it is a charity.” (*Musnad Ahmad*). There is a different version of this hadith in Bukhari, hadith 2320, which mentions “A Muslim who plants a tree or sows a seed”, instead of “Whoever tills a field”).

- The Quran also speaks of extending charity to all people including believers and unbelievers:

“Their guidance is not your duty, but Allah guides whom He pleases. And whatever good thing you spend, it is to your good. And you do not spend but to seek Allah’s pleasure.” (2:272)

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكَ هُدَاهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ
يَشَاءُ ۗ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَا نَنْفُسُكُمْ ۗ وَ
مَا تُنْفِقُونَ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ اللَّهِ ۗ

Reports relating to this verse show that it means that a Muslim must also extend his charity to the poor among sinners, non-Muslims and even opponents of Islam. The words “their guidance is not your duty” convey that if someone is refusing to follow the true guidance, a Muslim should not behave as if it is his duty or responsibility to bring him to guidance. Instead of thinking about that, a Muslim’s duty is to be charitable towards all who need help, regardless of who they are. In a hadith the Holy Prophet told the story of a man who went out, on three occasions, to give charity to a person at random. Every time he gave it, people said that he had unknowingly given it to an undeserving person and wasted his money. But the man thanked Allah that he gave it to such persons. Someone then told him how even those undeserving persons might have benefitted from his charity in a good way (Bukhari, hadith 1421).

- The Quran also mentions the duty of charity towards animals:

“And in their wealth was a due share for the beggar and for one who is deprived.” (51:19)

وَفِي أَمْوَالِهِمْ حَقٌّ لِّلسَّائِلِ وَالْمَحْرُومِ ﴿١٩﴾

The word for ‘deprived’ is *mahrūm* which is understood as applying both to a poor man who does not beg and to dumb animals as they are deprived of speaking. Charity towards animals obviously does not mean giving them money, but spending money on their welfare.

- Charity, in the specific sense of giving away one’s wealth, is of two kinds: voluntary and obligatory.
- Voluntary charity is generally mentioned in the Holy Quran as *infāq* or *ihsān* or *ṣadaqah*. The Holy Book is full of injunctions on this subject, and hardly a leaf is turned which does not bring to the mind the grand object of the service of humanity as the goal of man’s life.
- This subject is specially dealt with in verses 261 to 273 of the second chapter. The reward of charity is first spoken of:

“The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is as the parable of a grain growing seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies further for whom He pleases. And Allah is Ample-giving, Knowing.” (2:261)

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
 كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنْبَتَتْ سَبْعَ سَنَابِلٍ فِي كُلِّ
 سُنْبُلَةٍ مِائَةٌ حَبَّةٌ وَاللَّهُ يُضَعِفُ لِمَنْ
 يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٦١﴾

This indicates that the wealth of the whole nation or community grows if its members give in charity for the welfare of the poor and for national causes. For example, you invest in the poor to improve their education and health, and the well-being and prosperity of the community as a whole increases much more in proportion to what you gave.

- A charitable deed must be done as a duty which a human being owes to another, so that it conveys no idea of the superiority of the giver or the inferiority of the receiver:

“Those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah, then do not follow up what they have spent with reproach or injury, their reward is with their Lord. ... **A kind word with forgiveness is better than charity followed by injury.** ... O you who believe, do not make your charity worthless by reproach and injury,

الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ لَا
 يُتَّبِعُونَ مَا أَنْفَقُوا مَنًّا وَلَا أَدَىٰ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ
 عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ ...
 قَوْلٌ مَّعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ صَدَقَةٍ
 يَتَّبِعُهَا أَدَىٰ ...

like him who spends his wealth to be seen by people and does not believe in Allah and the Last Day.” (2:262–264)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَبْطُلُوا صَدَقَاتِكُمْ
بِالنَّاسِ وَالْأَدْيَىٰ كَالَّذِي يُنْفِقُ مَالَهُ رِثَاءَ
النَّاسِ وَلَا يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ

According to the last words of the above quotation, a person who gives in charity *only to be seen by others*, for show purposes, is like one who does not believe even in the very basic teachings of Islam.