

Fast 22: Charity — *Zakāt*

- Prayer in Islam is given a **regulated, specified form which is obligatory**. But within that regulated form we are highly encouraged to address God with our own prayers as we like. Similarly, charity in Islam is given a regulated form which is obligatory, known as ***zakāt***, but we are greatly urged to give in charity in a general way as well.
- The word *zakāt* has two meanings, and these are linked to the ideas of: (1) *growing*, and (2) *purifying*. The idea of purity, and that of the growth of human faculties and success in life, are thus connected together. *Zakāt* is wealth which is taken from the rich and given to the poor. It is so called because it makes wealth grow, and because the giving away of wealth is a source of purification. The giving away of wealth to the poorer members of the community increases the wealth of the community as a whole, and at the same time it purifies the giver's heart of the excessive love of wealth which leads to numerous sins. The Holy Prophet himself has described *zakāt* as wealth "which is taken from the rich and returned to the poor" (Bukhari, hadith 1395).
- The two commandments, to keep up prayer and to give *zakāt*, often go together in the Quran. This combination of the two is in the earliest as well as the latest chapters of the Quran. Thus in ch.73, which is one of the very earliest revelations, we have:

"...and keep up prayer and give the *zakāt* and offer to Allah a goodly gift." (73:20)

وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَقْرِضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا

And in the 9th chapter, the latest in revelation, a Muslim is described as one:

"...who believes in Allah and the Last Day, and keeps up prayer and gives the *zakāt* and fears none but Allah." (9:18)

...مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَلَمْ يَخْشَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ

- Prayer (*ṣalāt*) and *zakāt* are mentioned together in a large number of passages. These two are also treated as being the basic ordinances of Islam, and their carrying into practice is often mentioned as being sufficient indication that such a one is a believer in Islam. In an early revelation it is declared that people are required by Islam only to:

"...serve Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience, upright, and to keep up prayer and give the *zakāt*, and that is the right religion." (98:5)

...لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاءَ وَيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ

- *Ṣalāt* and *zakāt* are also spoken of together in the Quran as the basic ordinances of the religion of every prophet. Thus of Abraham and his posterity, it is said:

“And We made them leaders who guided people by Our command, and We revealed to them the doing of good and the keeping up of prayer and the giving of *zakāt*.” (21:73)

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَيْمَةً يَهْتَدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ فِعْلَ الْخَيْرَاتِ وَإِقَامَ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءَ الزَّكَاةِ

Accordingly, his son Ishmael is also spoken of as giving the same commandment to his followers: “And he enjoined on his people prayer and *zakāt*...” (19:55).

The Quran also says that the law of the Jews contained a similar commandment:

“And Allah said: Surely I am with you. If you keep up prayer and give the *zakāt* and believe in My messengers and assist them and offer to Allah a goodly gift,...” (5:12)

وَقَالَ اللَّهُ إِنِّي مَعَكُمْ لَئِنْ أَقَمْتُمُ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَيْتُمُ الزَّكَاةَ وَآمَنْتُمْ بِرُسُلِي وَعَزَّرْتُمُوهُمْ وَأَقْرَضْتُمُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا

Even Jesus is said to have received a similar Divine commandment:

“...and He has enjoined on me prayer and *zakāt* so long as I live.” (19:31)

وَأَوْصِيَنِي بِالصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ مَا دُمْتُ حَيًّا

- This view of religion shows that, according to the Holy Quran, the service of humanity and the improvement of the condition of the poor has always been among the principal aims and objects of religion. It is, however, true that the same stress has not been laid on this principle in the previous religions, and, moreover, the institution of *zakāt*, like every other principle of religion, has been brought to perfection in Islam, along with the perfection of religion.
- Islam has solved the problem of the distribution of wealth, and in such a way as to develop the higher, nobler sentiments of the individual and building up his character. *Zakāt* acts not only as a levelling influence in society, reducing inequality, but also as a means of developing the sentiments of love and sympathy towards one’s fellow humans. It is a tax, but paying it is a fundamental religious duty.
- As compared to this, the system of capitalism leads to the concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands, while the opposite system of state ownership and equality of distribution crushes man’s higher instincts of helping others personally.