

**Fast 24: Charity (continued)**

- Referring back to the verse quoted in the last Study, it is stated in it that among the qualities of a righteous Muslim is that he “gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the traveller and to those who ask and to set slaves free” (ch. 2, v. 177).
- The “near of kin”, even if taken literally, could be of any religion. When this verse was revealed every Muslim had among his near of kin those who did not accept Islam. When the Quran taught “do good to parents” (ch. 4, v. 36, ch. 6, v. 151, and other places), many Muslims had parents *who were still idol-worshippers*, but this command applied in their case as well. Notice that when the Bible had commanded, “Honour your father and your mother” (Exodus, 20:12), it addressed the Israelites, and their fathers and mothers belonged to *the same nation and religion* as the offspring. While we can **assume** that the Bible may also have meant its command regardless of the parents’ religion, in case of the Quran it is a **proven fact**.
- As to travellers, they have always been exploited, and more than ever before in modern times. Their position is somewhat like that of captives: being vulnerable and dependent on strangers, lacking right information and having few choices. But the Quran asks us to help them if they are stranded or in need.
- As to slaves, we know not of any law or religion *before Islam* which required its followers to spend money to free slaves and which mentioned slaves in the same list as the near of kin. Probably, no law of any kind *has ever done this* for the benefit of slaves. Unfortunately, the strong basis laid by Islam for the abolition of slavery was not built upon nor carried forward by later Muslims. Maulana Muhammad Ali writes of the measures taken by the Caliph Umar, only shortly after the Holy Prophet’s time:

“It must be recorded as one of the greatest achievements of the Caliph (Umar) that he took a very long step towards the abolition of slavery. If later generations of Muslim kings had carried on this gradual reform, as originally intended in the Quran itself, the institution of slavery would have been eradicated from among the Muslims twelve centuries ago.” (*The Early Caliphate*)

As it was, Muslim countries were among the last in the world where slavery was abolished.

- In the very earliest revelations to the Holy Prophet, the same kind of charity and service of suffering humanity is stressed. In chapter 90 the Quran speaks of the “uphill road” which people do not attempt to take. That road, it says, is as follows:

“... to free a slave, or to feed in a day of hunger an orphan near of kin, or the poor man lying in the dust. Then he (the one who does so) is of those who believe and exhort one another to patience, and exhort one another to mercy.” — ch. 90, v. 13–17

فَكَرْقَبَةٍ ﴿١٣﴾ أَوْ اطْعَمٌ فِي يَوْمٍ ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ ﴿١٤﴾  
يَتِيمًا إِذَا مَفْرَبَةٍ ﴿١٥﴾ أَوْ مِسْكِينًا إِذَا مَتْرَبَةٍ ﴿١٦﴾  
ثُمَّ كَانَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ وَ  
تَوَاصَوْا بِالرَّحْمَةِ ﴿١٧﴾

According to these verses, for someone to join the ranks of true believers, he must carry out the humanitarian acts listed here. This revelation came to the Holy Prophet during the first year of his mission, when Muslims numbered a mere handful. So the slaves, the orphans among near relatives, and the poor people mentioned here were predominantly non-Muslims.

- The unbreakable connection between prayer, in fact between the highest degree of righteousness, and the service of humanity is indicated in a verse which was quoted in Study 18 in relation to prayer. It says that only those are true believers who:

“... forsake (their) beds, calling upon their Lord in fear and in hope, and spend (on good works) out of what We have given them.” — ch. 32, v. 16

تَتَجَاوَى فِي جَنُوبِهِمْ عَنِ الْمَضَاجِعِ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ خَوْفًا وَ  
طَمَعًا وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

Not only are they so attracted to prayer that they give up the comfort of their beds at night to rise for the optional prayer of *Tahajjud*, but this is inseparable from their spending “out of what We have given them” for benevolent purposes.

- Then there is the following, starkly clear, chapter 107 of the Quran, the whole of which we quote below:

“Have you seen him who denies religion? That is the one who is rough to the orphan, and does not urge the feeding of the needy. So woe to the praying ones, who are unmindful of their prayer, who do (good) to be seen, and refrain from acts of kindness!”

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالْإِيمَانِ ﴿١﴾ فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدْعُ  
الْيَتِيمَ ﴿٢﴾ وَلَا يُخِضُّ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمِسْكِينِ ﴿٣﴾ فَوَيْلٌ  
لِّلْمُصَلِّينَ ﴿٤﴾ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ ﴿٥﴾  
الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاءُونَ ﴿٦﴾ وَيَنْهَعُونَ النَّاعُونَ ﴿٧﴾

It amounts to a denial of being a Muslim not only if you actually maltreat the destitute (“rough to the orphan”), but even if you fail to take part in helping them and withhold behaving kindly towards them, ignoring the suffering ones and just passing them by. It is declared here that if such people observe their prayers, then they are not learning anything from it, and their prayers amount to nothing more than a ritual and a show to impress others.