

Fast 23: Charity — *Zakāt*

- *Zakāt* is not simply obligatory charity. It is a state institution or, where there is no Muslim state, a national institution. The individual is not at liberty to calculate and spend his *zakāt* as he likes. It must be collected by the state on a national basis, and spent by the state or community.
- Where the Holy Quran describes the main heads of the expenditure of *zakāt*, it mentions an item of expenditure on officials appointed to collect and distribute the same, which shows clearly that, by the institution of *zakāt*, it contemplated either a department of the state or at least a public fund managed entirely by a public body. The donor is required to give *zakāt* to a fund which must be used for the uplift of the community. It was in this sense that the Holy Prophet understood it, and when he assumed control of the government, he made *zakāt* a state institution, appointing officials to collect it and directing his governors to do the same in distant provinces.
- *Zakāt* was an annual charge on property which remained in the possession of a person for a whole year, when its value reached a certain limit, called *niṣāb*. Certain possessions were exempt. *Zakāt* was levied at almost a uniform rate, being 2½ per cent of the accumulated wealth. Wealth has a tendency to accumulate, and *zakāt* aims at its partial redistribution in such a manner that the community, as a whole, may derive advantage from it. A part of the amassed wealth or capital of every individual is thus taken away annually and distributed among the poor and the needy.
- Where Muslims live under non-Muslim governments, and the collection and disbursement of *zakāt* cannot be undertaken by these governments, this duty devolves on the Muslim community as a whole, and the institution of *zakāt* must take the shape of a national Muslim institution in every country where there is a Muslim population.
- **How *zakāt* should be spent:** The Quran says:

“Charity (*ṣadaqāt*) is only for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer it, and those whose hearts are made to incline to truth, and (to free) the captives, and those in debt, and in the way of Allah, and for the traveller — an ordinance (*farīdah*) from Allah, and Allah is Knowing, Wise.” (9:60)

إِنَّمَا الصَّدَقَاتُ لِلْفُقَرَاءِ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَ
الْعَمِلِينَ عَلَيْهَا وَالْمَوْلَّاتِ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَفِي
الرِّقَابِ وَالْغَرَمِينَ وَفِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَابْنِ
السَّبِيلِ فَرِيضَةٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ
وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٦٠﴾

Zakāt is sometimes mentioned under the name of *ṣadaqah*, as here. It means *zakāt* here because at the end of the verse, where it is called an “ordinance”, *farīdah* or an obligatory duty.

- Spending *zakāt* as mentioned here can be divided into three heads of expenditure: spending it on those who stand in need of help, spending it on the officials appointed to manage the fund, and spending it in “the way of Allah”.
- Under the first category of expenditure are the following kinds of people:
 1. The “poor”, which is taken to mean those who cannot earn through some disability.
 2. The “needy”, which is taken to mean those who are able to earn but require help in earning their livelihood.

These two kinds of beneficiaries are mentioned first, before mentioning the officials who administer it, because *zakāt* was established primarily to help them.

3. Those who wish to learn the truth but need financial help to do so. For example, non-Muslims wanting to study Islam, as well as people who made sacrifices to embrace Islam. Such persons may stand in need of financial assistance. This could also include any students who need help.
4. Those who are in slavery or servitude, so that *zakāt* can be spent to purchase their freedom and set them free. This would include people trapped in oppressive contracts of employment, from which they cannot escape without external help.
5. People suffering because of being burdened by debt, i.e., those who borrowed money due to dire need or through ignorance, and are exploited by lenders.
6. Travellers who are stranded in a foreign country or in a distant place, and are unable to reach their homes.

The last three categories listed above are people who, due to their circumstances, are exploited by others. Islam has made it a fundamental of its teachings that the Muslim community or the Muslim government must assist such people.

- The second category of expenditure is on the maintenance of an establishment and office for the collection of *zakāt*.
- The third category of expenditure is described as “in the way of Allah”. This is primarily the defence of Islam, and in this age it means the propagation of the message of Islam to the world. Those involved in this work may be supported by the *zakāt* fund. But the words “in the way of Allah” also include any kind of charitable work not covered in the above list.