

Fast 22: Other fundamentals of Islam, and charity

- We return to the verses under discussion:

“...who believe in the Unseen and keep up prayer and spend (on good works) out of what We have given them, and who believe in what has been revealed to you (O Prophet) and what was revealed before you, and of the Hereafter they are sure.” (ch. 2, v. 3-4)

The question might be asked: if these verses are listing the basic teachings of Islam, why is only prayer mentioned, and fasting and pilgrimage are not mentioned? After all, there is a very well-known hadith in which the Holy Prophet Muhammad said:

“Islam is based on five (fundamentals): the testimony that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, the keeping up of prayer, the giving of *Zakat*, the Pilgrimage, and the fasting during Ramadan.” — Bukhari, hadith 8

بُيِّنَ الْإِسْلَامُ عَلَى خَمْسٍ شَهَادَةٌ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ
وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ، وَإِقَامِ الصَّلَاةِ، وَإِيتَاءِ
الزَّكَاةِ، وَالْحَجِّ، وَصَوْمِ رَمَضَانَ

- The answer is that “prayer” in this passage of the Quran includes the other acts of worship. It is just as this passage mentions belief in “the Unseen”, which is not only belief in God but in certain other unseen entities as well like angels. Similarly, this passage mentions spending out of what one has been given, which includes *Zakat* and other forms of charity. This passage doesn’t mention belief in prophets because that is included in the belief in their revelations.
- Prayer can include fasting and pilgrimage because the very act of prayer is that we go into the presence of God. The same is done in fasting and the pilgrimage:
 - During fasting, a person believes and feels most strongly that he or she is in the presence of God. This is a feeling which restrains him from eating and drinking. Also, in one of the verses about fasting, God Himself says: “I am near” (ch. 2, v. 186).
 - For the pilgrimage, a person goes to the House of God (ch. 2, v. 125), and to the place in the direction of which he says all his prayers, wherever he may be. While there, a pilgrim chants *Allahumma labbaika*, “Here I am, O Allah”.

Therefore, fasting in Ramadan and performing the pilgrimage to the Kabah in Makkah can be included under “prayer” because they put a person in a state like that of prayer.

- Following prayer, and connected with it, is the spending out of what God has given.

- Just as prayer establishes our relation with God, spending out of what we have been given establishes our relation with the world around us. The “spending” here, and what God has given people, is not only money or other material possessions. It includes everything we have been given, such as skills, talents, time, strength, and whatever else we use for our benefit.
- The Quran also mentions *zakat*, the defined monetary charity, as a fundamental of Islam, about 25 times. Almost always (except a couple of times), it is mentioned along with prayer. It occurs in the following form as a command, and in other forms:

“And keep up prayer and give the due charity” — ch. 2, v. 43, v. 83, v. 110, etc.

وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ

But “spending” is mentioned in the Quran more frequently than *zakat* (out of these, the combination of prayer and spending occurs 9 times). *Zakat* is, of course, included in spending, but the concept of spending is much more general.

- It is spending, of all kinds, which keeps the world economy going. People earn to spend. People save to spend. The only reason for saving is that what is saved is to be spent at some time. According to Islam, whatever you spend on a good or essential purpose, even if it is on your dependants or your own self, is spending in the way of Allah, the way required by Islam.
- Just as with prayer, this spending out of what God has given is not a merely formal act, done mechanically, and devoid of all feeling, while hoping for some reward from Allah. The Quran says to Muslims:

“You cannot attain to righteousness unless you spend out of **what you love**. And what you spend, Allah surely knows it.” — ch. 3, v. 92

لَنْ تَنَالُوا الْبِرَّ حَتَّى تُنْفِقُوا مِمَّا تُحِبُّونَ ۗ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٩٢﴾

It is a requirement of reaching a high stage in righteousness that you spend, and moreover you spend out of what you love, that is to say, the things you would like to keep for yourself. That takes effort and self-sacrifice. It is also a quality of the righteous that they help others out of love for God:

“And they give food, **out of love for Him**, to the poor and the orphan and the captive, saying: We feed you, for Allah’s pleasure only — we desire

وَيُطْعَمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا ﴿٨﴾ إِنَّمَا نُطْعِمُكُمْ لِوَجْهِ اللَّهِ لَا نُرِيدُ مِنْكُمْ

from you neither reward nor thanks.”
— ch. 76, v. 8–9

جَزَاءٌ وَلَا شُكُورًا ﴿٩﴾

The very fact that such acts are done without wanting any reward or thanks from the recipients itself leads to Allah being pleased with the giver.

The words translated as “out of love for Him” have been taken by some commentators and translators as meaning “despite their own love for it” or their own desire or want for the food. This interpretation gives it the same meaning as the verse quoted before it (ch. 3, v. 92), that they give to the needy what they want for themselves. However, since it is mentioned after it that “We feed you, for Allah’s pleasure only”, the interpretation “out of love for Him” is more in accord with the context.

It may be noted that “captive” here has a wide significance. It is not only the feeding of slaves or prisoners, but includes those who are captive in any sense, such as someone in the clutches of a money-lender, or slave to any addiction. Also, “the poor and the orphan and the captive”, whom a righteous Muslim should help, may be of any religion.