

Fast 23: Charity (continued)

- Another verse which clearly shows that the practice of charity in Islam is motivated by love, and not as a cold ritual or for seeking recognition from others, is as follows:

“It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteous is the one who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and 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 and keeps up prayer and gives the due charity (*zakat*); and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in the time of conflict. These are they who are truthful; and these are they who keep their duty.” — ch. 2, v. 177

لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ
وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ وَآتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى
حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَابْنَ
السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ
وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا ۗ
وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ
أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا ۗ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ ﴿١٧٧﴾

- The part relevant to our discussion is in bold, and I was going to quote only that. But the whole verse is so wonderful and inspiring that I decided to show it in full.
- Again, as in the last verse discussed in the last Study (ch. 76, v. 8), the words translated as “out of love for Him” have been taken by some commentators and translators as meaning “gives away wealth *despite his own love for it*”. But since belief in Allah is mentioned here shortly before, the translation “out of love for Him” is more suitable to the context.
- This verse is clearly an expansion of the verses 3–4 of ch. 2 that we have been discussing in the past several Studies, and it also reveals the true spirit of those verses. It begins by saying that no bodily ritual can make a person righteous. The turning of faces here refers back to verses 149–150 of ch. 2, which require Muslims to turn their faces towards the Sacred Mosque at Makkah in prayer: “And from whatsoever place you come forth, turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque. And wherever you are, turn your faces towards it” (v. 150). This verse says that it is not the turning of faces in some particular direction that can make a person righteous. The turning of faces in some direction, in fact, stands for all bodily postures and physical acts of worship.

- The words translated as “righteous is the one who” are literally in Arabic: “righteousness (*birr*) is the one who”. Having stated that righteousness (*birr*) is not turning your faces east or west, it then says: “righteousness (*birr*) is the one who...”. How does a person become “righteousness” itself? It is a style of the Arabic language that if someone is distinguished by a certain quality, so much so that he personifies that quality, he is called by the name of that quality. What is meant here is: “the **model of righteousness** is the one who believes in Allah, ...”.
- Here belief in the Unseen of v. 3 of ch. 2 is expressed as belief in Allah and the angels. The belief in *what was revealed to the Holy Prophet and what was revealed before him*, of v. 4, becomes belief in the “Book and the prophets”. The word Book here is in the singular (book, not books). It may mean the phenomenon of revelation to prophets. If it means the Quran, then what it indicates is that the Quran represents all the books of God. It does so by preserving all the best of the earlier books in One Book which, moreover, was not going to be lost or corrupted by human hands.
- The requirement of v. 3 of ch. 2 to “spend out of what We have given them” is expanded here by specifying the most important objects of that spending. In its most basic and essential form, it consists of “giving away wealth out of love for Him”. The verse goes on to mention later the giving of *zakat*. This shows that the mention here of giving away of wealth, to help the people listed here, refers to what a Muslim must do **voluntarily**, as an option, if he or she is to become a **model** of righteousness. The *zakat* that is mentioned later in this verse was obligatory, and in the Holy Prophet Muhammad’s time and in early Islam it was taken by the state from Muslims as a tax. It was taken from a Muslim whether he was righteous or not, whether he did it for the love of Allah or not.
- It is also instructive to observe that after listing the five beliefs of Islam, when the verse moves on to practical duties of a Muslim, it places first, **not the obligatory ones** of prayer and *zakat*, the ones which have a specified form and can become rituals, but the optional ones which are done out of love for God. Moreover, in these optional ones it mentions **only those** relating to the service of humanity and helping others. This clearly shows that belief in the doctrines of Islam should create, and lead to, such a love for God in our hearts that it inspires us to do good to those in need of help.
- Mentioning first the “near of kin” illustrates, of course, the saying that charity begins at home. But near of kin is anyone with whom we have a relationship of nearness in any manner, such as our neighbours, people with whom we work, people with whom we transact any business, people not known to us with whom we are on a journey, etc.