

## Zakat — Obligatory Charity

Fortunately, there are no “bulls of inequity” involved with the *Zakat*, or obligatory charity. However, this third pillar of Islam is so critical, that it is worth a short discussion.

The following verse contains God’s response to the prayer of Moses when he took seventy men to the place he met with Him, and they “*were seized with violent quaking.*”

*...He said: “With My Punishment  
I visit whom I will;  
But My Mercy extendeth  
To all things. That (Mercy)  
I shall ordain for those  
Who do right, and practise  
Regular charity...  
(The Holy Quran VII:156 [7:156])*

From this verse it is clear that giving the obligatory charity is critical, for it is one of the requirements for God’s mercy!

Since it is so important, what else does God tell us in the Quran about the obligatory charity? He tells us that it must be given on the “*day that the harvest is gathered.*”

*...Eat of their fruit  
In their season, but render  
The dues that are proper  
On the day that the harvest  
Is gathered...  
(The Holy Quran VI:141 [6:141])*

Thus, we must “*render the dues that are proper on the day that the harvest is gathered.*” That means that the obligatory charity

(*dues that are proper*) must be given on the day of harvest. Rashad Khalifa translates this a bit more clearly as “*give the due alms on the day of harvest*” (*Quran: The Final Testament* 6:141). For those of us who do not farm that would be when the money comes in... or when we “harvest” our paychecks.

Yet, when I first was becoming a Muslim, I was told that I needed to give the obligatory charity only once a year, and then just on my savings. God’s command is to give it “*on the day that the harvest is gathered.*” Since God made giving the obligatory charity a requirement for receiving His mercy, I want to give it every time I receive income!!!

How much do we give? From the time of Abraham, the amount has been set at two and a half percent of our net (income after taxes). This is a very small amount, but when it is given regularly, it can make a great deal of difference to both the individuals who receive it and to society as a whole.

Who receives it? God makes it very clear that it should go to needy family members first, then the other categories listed in this next verse:

*They ask you about giving: say, “The charity you give shall go to the parents, the relatives, the orphans, the poor, and the traveling alien.”...*  
(*Quran: The Final Testament* 2:215)

In Deuteronomy 26:11-12 the Torah describes a form of tithing which is very similar to the Quran’s obligatory charity, though it was required only every third year. And after describing the poor behavior of many when fasting, Isaiah gives us the following:

*No, this is the fast I desire:  
To unlock fetters of wickedness...  
To let the oppressed go free...  
It is to share your bread with the hungry,  
And to take wretched poor into your home;  
When you see the naked, to clothe him,*

*And not to ignore your own kin.  
(Isaiah 58:6-7 - Tanakh: A New Translation...)*

Charity is encouraged in both the Torah and the Gospels, and many Jews and Christians are very, very charitable. God requires Muslims to give so little, and He rewards us so much. He also encourages us to give other charity besides the obligatory charity, and He encourages anonymous charity, as stated in these next verses:

*...If ye disclose (acts  
Of) charity, even so  
It is well,  
But if ye conceal them,  
And make them reach  
Those (really) in need,  
That is best for you:  
It will remove from you  
Some of your (stains  
Of) evil....  
(The Holy Quran II:270-1 [2:270-1])*

So it is best to give anonymously. Thus the charity remits your sins. Like the Quran, Jesus taught that charity is best when done secretly (see Matthew 6:1-4).

However, though it is good to give to charity, the Quran teaches that it is dangerous to be excessive, as these next verses tell us:

*And render to the kindred  
Their due rights, as (also)  
To those in want,  
And to the wayfarer:  
But squander not (your wealth)  
In the manner of a spendthrift.  
Verily spendthrifts are brothers  
Of the Evil Ones;  
And the Evil One*

*Is to his Lord (Himself)  
Ungrateful.  
(The Holy Quran XVII:26-7 [17:26-7])*

Moderate charity, both obligatory and voluntary, is an important part of our religion, for women as well as men. And it is a requirement for us to attain God's mercy.



*The following story is that of a very charitable sister who wishes to remain anonymous.*

### Charity: Who Benefits?

*You cannot attain righteousness until you give to charity from the possessions you love. Whatever you give to charity, God is fully aware thereof.  
(Quran: The Final Testament 3:92)*

My personal experience has been that when I give charity, I receive much more than I give. There are immediate and very strong positive feelings. It always makes me feel good. I grew up with a sense that people who need charity are deadbeats, lazy and undeserving. God has caused me to see how untrue and unfair that attitude is. He makes it clear that charity is the *right* of those who receive it; they are entitled to it. When I give charity, I am simply the instrument through which the money passes to its rightful owner.

I try to give anonymously as much as possible; it's better for me and easier for the recipient. But sometimes you get to see the results, how it has helped someone. A few years ago, a sister slipped a ten-dollar bill into the purse of another sister who was pregnant and the mother of two. She found the money and exclaimed, "This is perfect! I can get the sweater I really wanted." It made everyone smile.

I have also found that God often compensates me in a real sense as well. Frequently right after I've given zakat, a check will come in the mail, something I wasn't expecting. It reminds me that God is in charge, and if I think I don't have enough to spare, it reminds me that God has more than enough.

*– A submitter who knows:*

*Any charity you give is for your own good.*

*Any charity you give shall be for the sake of God.*

*Any charity you give will be repaid to you, without the least injustice.*

*(Quran: The Final Testament 2:272)*

