

Fast 21: Fundamentals of Islam — 3

- Continuing with the verse from the last Study, we quote below from its middle:

<p>“... righteous is the one who ... 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 (<i>zakat</i>); 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</p>	<p>... وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ ... آتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ ۗ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ ۗ وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا ۗ وَ الصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا ۗ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ ﴿١٧٧﴾</p>
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- Zakat*, or the obligatory charity due on a Muslim’s wealth, is mentioned separately in this verse, and should be a national fund that Muslims contribute to. This means that the spending mentioned here as “giving away wealth out of love for Him” is voluntary charity by individuals at their own discretion. Islam recognizes a role for both the state, or the community, and for the individual in spending money to alleviate hardship. The pure capitalist system doesn’t recognize such a role for the state but leaves it all up to the individual. The pure socialist system doesn’t recognize such a role for the individual but leaves it all up to the state. However, both are necessary. The individual’s role in this respect not only helps the recipient but improves the moral character of the giver and strengthens human bonds as well.
- The “near of kin” are mentioned first in the list. A person is most duty-bound to help those nearest to him in relationship because he knows their circumstances much better than he knows anyone else’s. This also shows that Islam envisages a society in which the same families have both wealthy and poor members among them, so that the wealthy ones have the duty of helping the poor ones. It is not a society in which the wealthy don’t have any poor relatives, and the poor don’t have any wealthy relatives, a society that is divided and segregated into rich families and poor families.
- It should also be noted that Islam **does not restrict** that any of these deserving people in these categories should be Muslims. This is clear from the fact that in a very early revelation, in ch. 90, it is described as a noble task “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” (ch. 90, v. 13–16). The persons who undertake this task are described in that chapter as “those who believe and exhort one another to patience, and exhort one another to mercy” (v. 17) and as being “the people of the right hand” (v. 18). This is as contrasted with “those

who disbelieve” who are called “the people of the left hand” (v. 19). When this revelation came, there were so few Muslims that the slaves, the near of kin and the poor mentioned here were predominantly non-Muslims.

In ch. 4, v. 36 it is made explicitly clear that a Muslim’s charity should extend to all, regardless of their religion or nation. That verse also gives a list of those to whom a Muslim must do good, and after mentioning parents, near of kin, orphans and needy, it adds: “and the neighbour of (your) kin and the alien neighbour”. The alien neighbour is one who belongs to another people, nation, religion, etc., from what you are.

- According to the verse under discussion, slaves are among those on whom the righteous must spend their wealth, that is, to have them freed. Here it is voluntary charity which Muslims are encouraged to spend for this purpose. In ch. 9, v. 60, where the items of expenditure of the state-collected *zakat* are listed, one of these is for setting “captives” free. Thus, both the taxes paid by Muslims to their state, and the private charity given by individuals among Muslims, are to be used to purchase freedom for slaves. A penalty prescribed in the Quran for certain offences is that the offender may free a slave if he has the means to purchase freedom for him (see ch. 5, v. 89, and ch. 58, v. 3).

Apart from spending wealth on deserving persons, a quality of the righteous is to give food to those who need it. Speaking of the righteous (*abrar*), the Quran says:

<p>“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 from you neither reward nor thanks.” — ch. 76, v. 8–9</p>	<p>وَيُطْعَمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا ﴿٨﴾ إِنَّمَا نَطْعِمُكُمْ لَوَجْهِ اللَّهِ لَا نُرِيدُ مِنْكُمْ جَزَاءً وَلَا شُكْرًا ﴿٩﴾</p>
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The captive here includes slaves, who were the primary example of captives. Out of their love for God, the righteous give them food and do this completely selflessly: they ask no reward or thanks from the people whom they help.

- Another quality of those who aspire to be righteous mentioned in v. 177 of ch. 2 is: “the performers of their promise when they make a promise”. This means that in actual practice they are true to their word. Their promises are not made to deceive or impress others by mere talk, but are converted into action.
- It can be seen that this verse 177 of ch. 2 blends together the following elements: the fundamental beliefs and doctrines of Islam, its formal practices of prayer and *zakat*,

love for God, service of humanity, and the highest personal moral qualities of truthfulness and perseverance in adverse circumstances. That total combination produces a righteous person, and not merely ritual actions of prayer, such as which way to turn the face.