

## Fast 19: Charity

- The second great pillar on which the structure of Islam stands, as laid down in the Holy Quran, is charity towards fellow human beings. Charity is meant in its widest sense. This is made plain in the very beginning of the Holy Book (2:3–4) where the main principles of Islam, three theoretical and two practical, are laid down. The three theoretical essentials are belief in God, in Divine revelation and in the Hereafter; and the two practical are keeping up prayer and spending out of what God has given to man. Muslims are described there as those:

“who believe in the Unseen and keep up prayer and spend out of what We have given them.” (2:3)

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ  
وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

Spending out of whatever has been given to us, mentioned here after prayer, stands for charity in a broad sense, i.e., for all acts of benevolence and doing good to humanity in general. For what God has given to us is not only the wealth which we possess but all the faculties and powers with which we have been gifted.

- This verse shows the natural order. Belief in the Unseen is the starting point of our spiritual progress. But this would lead to no good if the next step, the seeking of closeness to the Unseen through prayer, does not follow. And this again is meaningless if it does not lead to acts of benevolence. Prayer, therefore, is the first step because it leads to the second, that is, charity.
- It is a constant theme of the Holy Quran that benevolence, or the doing of good to others, is one of the two mainstays of religion. For example, rejecting the Jewish and Christian claims to salvation on the basis of certain dogmas, the Holy Book says:

“No, whoever submits himself entirely to Allah and he is the doer of good to others, he has his reward from his Lord, and there is no fear for such nor shall they grieve.” (2:112)

بَلَىٰ مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَلَهُ  
أَجْرُهُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ  
يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿١١٢﴾

Comparing the two verses 2:3 and 2:112, in this verse, *submission to Allah* stands for prayer and *doing of good to others* stands for spending out of what has been given.

- When prayer and charity are spoken of together, which is very frequently in the Quran, prayer always comes before charity. This is because prayer prepares a person for the service of humanity.
- The most frequently occurring words for charity are:
  - *infāq* which means ‘spending benevolently’,
  - *ihsān* which means ‘the doing of good’,
  - *zakāt* which means ‘growth’ or ‘purification’, and
  - *ṣadaqah* which is derived from the root *ṣidq*, meaning ‘truth’, and comes to signify a ‘charitable deed’.

Thus the very words used to denote charitable deeds are an indication of the broadness of its conception.

- The Holy Quran of course lays stress on such great deeds of charity as the emancipation of slaves (90:13, 2:177), the feeding of the poor (69:34 etc.), taking care of orphans (17:34 etc.) and doing good to humanity in general. Not only this, but the Quran gives equal emphasis to smaller acts of benevolence. It is for this reason that the withholding of *small acts of kindness and charity* is stated to be against the spirit of prayer: “Woe to the praying ones, who are unmindful of their prayers, who do good to be seen, and refrain from (small) acts of kindness” (107:4–7).
- Likewise, the use of kind words is recommended as in itself a charitable deed in many places in the Quran, for example 2:83 and 4:8, and the speaking of a kind word to parents is referred to as *ihsān* in 17:23.
- Hadith is much more explicit on the acts which constitute charity. To remove from the road anything which may cause hurt is called a *ṣadaqah* or a charitable deed. According to another hadith, “There is a *ṣadaqah* (charity) due on every limb with every new sun, and to do justice among people is also a charity” (Bukhari, hadith 2707).
- Another report in Hadith gives more detail:
 

“On every limb there is an act of charity due every day (i.e., every limb of a person must perform some charitable act every day); a man helps another to ride his animal, it is a charity; or he helps him to load his animal, this is also a charity; and so is a good word; and every step, which a person takes in going to pray, is a charity; and to show (someone) the way is a charity.” (Bukhari, hadith 2891. See also hadith 2989)

- Examples of other charitable deeds in Hadith are “your salutation to people,” “your enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong,” “refraining from doing evil to anyone” and so on.