

“Sadaqah” A Sacred Institution to Facilitate the Poor

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This paper was prepared on the request of the Chairperson, “Council of Islamic Ideology Pakistan” (Constitutional Institution of Pakistan) a few years ago to answer the question: “How can an individual or an institution contribute to upgrade the quality of life of the less fortunate ones? With this discussion on the ‘Institution of Sadaqah’, an attempt has been made to re-establish an institution, to facilitate the poor class of the Ummah and improve their quality of life.

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1. Introduction:

Today, the Muslim society is a victim of many social evils, due to a lack of awareness of religious education. Narrow mindedness is the result of this attitude, because education of Islam opens many windows. Educated upper class considers Shariah as an out-dated code of life. Ignorance of the Science of Islam is the core reason for the mutilation of the faith. This situation allows people to accept the influence of their surroundings, which later on become part of their faith. Today Muslims follow customs and rituals more punctually and strictly while forgetting the original teachings of Shariah. Due to this negative attitude, no discrimination between right and wrong exists for them, and the benedictions of the institution of Sadaqah seem to have lost their importance. This divine gift, which was conferred through the institution of Wahi, for the elevation of the less-fortunate class of the society, has become a forgotten chapter. In Southeast Asia, Muslims practiced Sadaqah in the same manner as the Hindu ritual of “D’an & Darakshna”. The Hindus believed that something should be donated to the priest-class and in return hoped that ones misfortune or difficulty would be removed. Unfortunately, our people at large treat charitable institutions of Islam in the same manner, as it is explained in the “Hindu Mythology”.

Plunderers of the faith—the so-called clergy, are largely responsible for undermining the real spirit of this institution. They exploit the masses and lead them to serve their own interests. It is a pity that the people have forgotten this institution of their own welfare, and are being exploited by the clerics in the name of religion. These clerics try their best to snatch valuables in the name of Allah. “It is worth-mentioning what people do to ‘drive away their misfortunes’:

- To avoid misfortunes and troubles, people would put the head of a goat, on the corner of a street.*
- To cure an illness and other needs, people feed pieces of meat to kites and crows.*

- *To fulfill hopes and good wishes, a lemon punctured with a clove inside is thrown on the street.*
- *To protect a baby from evil-eye, an egg is waved around the head and thrown outside.*
- *'Ulama al Su', to satisfy their selfish desires ask for different costly items, such as gold, silver, Musk, Aud-Aloes wood, Saffron, and other valuables, other than money, according to the status of the needy person in the name of Sadaqah & Khair'at".[1]*

2. Misinterpretation of Sadaqah:

It is necessary to examine the root causes of misinterpretation of the term "Sadaqah" by our people. People influenced by their surroundings donate Sadaqah just to remove their problems. It becomes a habit, which has turned into their faith. On the other side, the clergy pursues a luxurious life style. They indulge in money-minting and non-constructive activities. Instead of a scientific research, in the studies of Qur'an and Islam and welfare of the community, they love to spend time in profligacy. Today, people treat the item donated in the name of Sadaqah with a social stigma as something meant for the poorest of the poor. No one would like to even touch it, as people think that the Af'aat of the person attached to it on whose name it is donated may come upon them. The cultured class is also unaware about the spirit of Sadaqah. One giving the Sadaqah tries to give it away as early as possible, as it is believed that it is not good to carry the same, and is considered a bad omen. The innocent people are amazed when advised them to carry Sadaqah till any deserving person available. They fear if they carry it with them perhaps face any kind of trouble. The reason for such superstitious beliefs is only due to lack of correct information from the right source. There is no reference in the Fiqah-literature that the receiver of Sadaqah will face any harm or problem, as is wrongly believed. Such beliefs are the result of the ignorance of the people about the divine philosophy. The charlatans and the perfidious clergy have misled the masses away from the truth. People have forgotten the original Talim and remain busy in absurd customs and rituals taught by the clerics. Traditions and rituals have no concern with the religion, but unfortunately they are treated as part of religion.

3. Definition of Sadaqah:

Those who divide Islam, politics and economics in three different categories, can not find the solutions of the financial crises of the Ummah. The shortsighted clergy can not help in building a welfare society, which Islam has ordained. Social and economic crises of the Ummah can be solved if people practice according to the advice of Qur'an. Presently, it is only a neglected lesson, which exists without its original spirit. Raghib Isfahani wrote in his famous book: "Mufarradat al Qur'an" as follows:

"The meaning of the word Sadaqah in the language of Shariah is to grant or donate with free-will to others". [2]

Meaning of Sadaqah is explained in "Qamus al Fiqahi" as follow:

“Sadaqah is that which is donated to others only to please Allah and to get His nearness”. [3]

The word Sadaqah is from the word Sidq, which means truth and sincerity, the truth and sincerity, which are expressed to others with true intention to help a needy deserving class. Any kind of help which you give to others in cash or in any form is an act of Sadaqah. This act demands sincerity, because it is Allah alone who in return removes or lessens the problems which a person faces. Sadaqah is a very wide term and is used in the Qur’an to cover all kinds of charity.

Ahadith Literature provides us following Talim in regard of Sadaqah:

- *“Your smile for your brother is Sadaqah”. [4]*
- *“Enjoining what is right & forbidding what is wrong is Sadaqah” [5]*
- *Giving a smile or a glass of water to a thirsty person or even a word of kindness and so on. [6]*
- *Planting something from which a person, bird or animal afterwards takes benefit also counts Sadaqah*
- *Your removal of stones, thorns or bones from the paths of people is Sadaqah. [7]*
- *Guiding a person who is lost is also Sadaqah.” [8]*
- *Helping someone to establish himself in professional life, assisting someone acquire good learning; monetary assistance for the treatment of the sick; looking after the orphans and the destitute; giving scholarships to students, all such charitable works, come under Sadaqah-Jariyah--that is why so many traditions are available which explain the reward of this practice and attracts the community to promote it. “The reward for giving Sadaqah in secret is seventy times superior to that of giving it publicly”. [9]*

The highest degree of Sadaqah is that which should be given secretly so that the other hand may not know of it. It is however not restricted to pay Sadaqah openly, but according to the Talim of the Qur’an and Sunnah, and guidance of Ahl al Bait and Ash’ab it is preferable that Sadaqah be given secretly, that is superior in practice. According to Abi Abdillah Imam Jafar Assadiq, except ‘Bani Hashim’, Sadaqah could be given to any needy Mumin.

Qur’an describes pious as follows:

“And in their wealth there was the right of the “Sa’el”-needy person and the “Mahrum”-poor who does not approach others”. [10]

Good conduct is frequently termed Sadaqah in the Hadith. In this extended sense, acts of loving, kindness, even greeting one another with a cheerful face, is regarded as Sadaqah. In brief, every good deed is Sadaqah. This should start at home, as per Hadith:

“When one of you is poor, he starts with himself. If anything is left, he spends it on his family. If anything is (still) left then on his relatives, and then, if more is left, he spends it here and there.” [11]

4. Philosophy of Sadaqah in Qur'an:

Sadaqah is the best act through which a person could achieve nearness of Allah and fight the forces of evil. The economic system of Islam provides us Talim that wealth should not be accumulated in the hands of one person, neither a wealthy, rich person should become a 'Shaddad', 'Hamman' and 'Abu Lahab' to cover his wealth like a snake. Similarly, the Trustees of Bait al M'aal should not utilize the fund unjustifiably, which is similar to sucking the blood of the poor. Islam totally condemns it. Today the rich and wealthy of a society have become cruel so as to suck the blood of the poor, but Islam is a religion of Justice, which never allows that a person may become a prey of another person. It provides assurance that all people are not equal, neither in knowledge nor in wealth or power. One may be earning a lot, another less. One may be a hard worker, the other may not be so, yet another may be jobless, handicapped or crippled. Qur'an has defined the Ummah as a large family, which deserve and demand a close co-operation, mutual help and care, feeling of sacrifice among each other. Qur'an has given an assurance to this family (Ummah) for survival and bestows a golden principle:

"Help and co-operate among each other in goodness and virtue". [12]

5. Strong Recommendations of Sadaqah:

Rasulullah (S) guides the Ummah regarding Sadaqah and Inf'aaq several times, and encourages them through so many Ahadith. Sadaqah is the famous institution of charity. This is an institution through which one can spend in the name of Allah, for the cause of Allah. It is the 'identity card' to achieve nearness of Allah. It is the name of carrying good deeds. It is the way to fulfill the needs of the deserving class. Qur'an says:

"Say: "Verily my Lord increases the Rizaq-substance for whomsoever He wills of His servants, and restricts it (for whomsoever He wills) and He repays whatsoever you spend. He is the best of all providers". [13]

One assurance has been given in Qur'an, which is not found in any other Scriptures:

"Those who spend their money (by giving Sadaqah, Khair'at to deserving) openly or quietly in the day and at night, their reward is with their Lord the Cherisher, they will not face any danger nor face sorrow or grief". [14]

Commentators of the Qur'an are unanimous on the Nuzul of the above Ayah that it came down in praise of Ali to glorify his Sadaqah of four Darhams in the way of Allah—one by night, one by day, one secretly and one openly.

Let us take an example from some standard level. Today, while man has become materialistic, he first secures his selfish interest. He will not do anything without any interest. But the best assurance for secure profits is given in the following Ayah of the Qur'an:

"The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is as the likeness of a grain, which grows seven ears; in every ear a hundred grains; and verily, Allah gives manifold to whomever He wills, and Allah is omniscient, knowing". [15]

Now pay attention and think over it, what a divine message Qur'an conveys to believers. Those who make a name in misery, whose hearts are narrow and tied up just like a handcuffed chain; they are away from the sense of kindness. Qur'an has mentioned such people in such a strong manner that the entire body shivers on its warnings. Directions have been given as follows:

"Listen! You people are invited to spend your money in the way of Allah, but some among you are miser. In fact they are doing misery with themselves; (i.e. not sharing part in Sadaq'at and Khair'at made them deprived of Barak'at and Naimat); while Allah is self sufficient and you are needy. If you turn back, He will bring other people in your place (the Naimat you have should be transferred to other) who will not be like you".

[16]

After this, again there is a warning of a horrible punishment as follows:

"No one will be thrown in it but the miser, who deny the truth and turns his back". [17]

Strong tone and clear wordings of the above Ay'ah is enough of a warning to the miser. Numerous Ahadith carry Talim and explain the significance of Sadaqah. Qur'an and Ahadith repeatedly and forcefully informed and insisted upon those in the Ummah, who have been rewarded with bounty, not to spend their wealth as an Isr'af, or for glorification among people. Instead they must spend it on deserving, needy people, who keep their problems hidden, due to self-respect. Many people go to bed without food. In winter, due to shortage of clothes, they face cold winds, and suffer various diseases without medicines.

6. Evils of Society:

One should keep in mind that class discrimination and poverty are two different things. In each society, class discrimination problems survive. Guidance of Islam regarding the removal of differences among classes is that the poor class must have the necessities of the life, according to the need of the time. Class discrimination is tyranny, which is the outcome of the three evils. Rasulallah (S) has declared Jih'ad against them. In 'Ghazwah Badar', these 'Three Evils' were present, and also represented individually. First was the Ruler, Abu Jahl; the second was the Capitalist power of Quresh and third was the Cleric, Abi Lahab. These three forces are still present today in different faces and dresses. The influential partner of this 'Troika' is Ulama as Su (the Clerics). They are the most dangerous than the two others, as they cheat in the name of Allah and His Rasul. It is their profession, everywhere. 'Ulama as Su' does not offer constructive guidance to the Ummah, but misleads them and when less fortunate class discusses their problems with them they explain them as it is their destiny. For them nothing in this world will get them reward in Akhirah. Neither Qur'an nor Rasulallah (S) provides this Talim. If people come out of the Net of the Ulama as Su, they would be able to spend better lives. People of all classes should avoid financial support to the clergy in the name of religion, and donate to welfare and charitable projects from which needy people can be helped. An Urdu poet had discussed Ulama al Su, and rightly explained in his poetry as follows:

*"Geo Mulla Dharakey Sey;
Duniya Margai Faqey Sey"*

O Crook clerics! Enjoy the life, you are free of worries, (as your perpetual source of income is 'Bait al M'aal' of public, including non broken chain of donations under numerous heads); while masses have multiple problems, the poor go to sleep without food.

*"Tu Kh'aa Mazey Sey Halwey M'andey;
Tujh Ku Kiya Hey A'atey Sey" [18]*

You enjoy feast everyday; have you ever considered how difficult it is for less-fortunate to earn a living?

7. Responsibility of the intelligentsia:

It is a responsibility of the intelligentsia that they help to communicate the practical constructive aspect of Islam and spread the forgotten divine teachings. The benefits of Sadaqah institution are vast. It is time that we rebuild this neglected institute for the larger interest of the Ummah. It carries the solution to the financial crises of the Ummah. This institution is an indispensable need of the present age. Through this august institution, the problems of the less fortunate people can be eased to a great extent. For the removal of the social evils, Sadaqah is a gateway. Sadaqah is a compound term, which covers all aspects of welfare. Under this a contributor has an open choice to spend money in different faculties of welfare. Sadaqah should be given from ones legal income, because it is Allah, who receives it and no other than Him who will give the reward for it.

8. Significance of Sadaqah in Ahadith:

The importance and utility of the Sadaqah has been mentioned in the following Ahadith:

1. Sadaqah provides protection from the divine punishment. [19]
2. Pay Sadaqah, you will be released from Jahannam-Hell.[20]
3. That person is Maloon-curse who has the capability to give Sadaqah but never does it. Has not anyone heard the Hadith that spending one Dirham as Sadaqah is superior and much greater than ten days Nawafil.[21]
4. Those who are paying Sadaqah, in reward, will be protected from the heat of the grave.[22]
5. Give Sadaqah, it removes poverty and difficulties, and prolongs once age, life. [23]
6. Sick person should give Sadaqah through his hand and request the receiver to offer Dua for him, (when receiver offers Dua, the giver should recite A'amin). [24]
7. "When people leave the practice of Sadaqah health problems multiply". [25]
8. Treat and cure your patients through the Sadaqah. [26]
9. Each closed door has its own key, and Sadaqah is the key of Rizaq -- source of income. [27]
10. "Spend Sadaqah, to minimize the ratio of poverty, it will increase your wealth and Allah will bestow upon you benedictions. [28]

9. Teachings of Ahl al Bait regarding Sadaqah:

Ahl al Bait have given a number of recommendations regarding Sadaqah.

1. Ali ibn al Husain Zain al Abidin says:

“Whenever anybody gives Sadaqah to any needy one, and the receiver offers Dua for the giver, the Doa is definitely accepted. Whenever the Imam gave something as Sadaqah, he also used to kiss on the hand of the beggar just to pay respect. When, it was inquired by some learned one, “you are the grandson of Rasul (S), people kiss your hand as reverence, why do you kiss the hand of the beggar”? His humble reply guides us how we should treat a beggar. To teach the manner of sincerity in Sadaqah, Imam said: “Sadaqah is like a thing that comes through Allah”. [29]

This explanation proves and teaches how to donate Sadaqah. Never remind the receiver what you donated him, nor taunt him nor remind your act of generosity. Qur’an has warned in Ayah 264 of Surah al Baqarah in this regard clearly. Do not offer Sadaqah in a degradingly manner, but with grace and honour. If the beggar accepts your Sadaqah, then through his Dua your action will be blessed by Allah. It becomes your baggage for the eternal journey and source of salvation.

2. When Ali Zain al Abidin was buried, there was a mark on his backside. Some one asked his son, Abi Jafar Mohammad al Baqir about the mark as it did not seem to be a wound. He replied, my father was a great benefactor of the poor, orphans, widows, helpless and needy ones. He used to take dates and bread in a bag and carry it on his back every night through the streets of Madinah to distribute it to the needy. The mark was caused by the weight of those things. [30]
3. Sadaqah takes away your Qarz (loan) and brings blessings. [31]

Love for worldly possessions is primarily a disease of the heart while the purpose of Sadaqah acts as its antidote or cure. Sadaqah serves as a form of Zikar to remind us that all forms of wealth comes from Allah and what we possess is simply a short term loan for which we will be held accountable when our contract expires. This loan is meant to cater for our personal and family needs, and those of the wider society.

10. A few eye opener points:

Everyone knows the common attitude of the people regarding Sadaqah. They donate stale food, used clothes, old shoes, and rejected house hold items to the poor as a Sadaqah, in the name of Allah, for reward. This is not Sadaqah, but it is simply playing hypocrisy with Allah. It is a misinterpretation of the meaning of Qura’an and a shameful act. Ayah 267 of Surah al Baqarah guides us in this regard: ‘Not to give that which we reject as bad’. Abizar al Ghaffari’s question with Rasulullah (S) and his reply should be enough for guidance. He asked: O my Lord! Which Sadaqah is best? Rasulullah (S) replied:

“It should be valuable and the receiver should like it very much”. [32]

It is a reality that many undeserving people ask for Sadaqah. They are professional beggars seeking Sadaqah from every corner. It is better that the person who gives Sadaqah should investigate before giving, whether the person is eligible or not. Fiqah Literature has condemned such professional askers who do not work to earn their livelihood by lawful means, though they are not handicapped. They enjoy the luxuries of life through easy earnings and hate to do any work. Such people take wrong advantage of Sadaqah without any justification and earn their livelihood without due struggle. Sadaqah is reserved only for the really needy and deserving persons. It is not for the 'Haram Khawr' class of professional askers. Abi Abdillah Imam Jafar Assadiq says: "A few Ans'ar came in the presence of Rasulullah (S) extended him Sal'am, and submitted that they come with intention that he fulfils their demands". Rasulullah (S) asked which thing?" They requested," we wish for a great thing". Rasulullah (S) asked: "tell me what it is?" They said, "We want assurance of Jannat for us". Rasulullah (S) bent down his head for a while, then he marked a line on the floor, with a stick, and raising his head replied, "There is one condition, and it is that you will never ask for anything from any one except Allah, and will not raise your hand to others". [33]

11. Concluding Remarks:

The three basic rules involved in giving money emphasize charity as a religious obligation:

First: a Muslim must give in the name of Allah.

Second: all money donated must be from a legitimate source. Money that has been obtained by illegal source or earned unethically is unacceptable before Allah.

Third: all excess wealth is seen as Allah's ownership in Islam.

'Hajjat al Jazirah' of the 9th Fatemi Imam, Syedna Husain bin Saeed al Ahwazi (d. around 256 A.H) transmitted Traditions of Ahl al Bait in his book: "Kit'aab al Mumin". I concluded my discussion on the following Imami Tradition, as Khitam al Misk (sealed of fragrance), Abi Abdillah Imam Jafar Assadiq says:

"One who provides 'Monetary Relief' to a Mumin at the time of 'Crisis' and help him for his 'Prosperity', Allah shall fulfill his Haj'aat-wishes, here and hereafter".

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