

Inf'aaq: A Forgotten Talim of the Qur'an

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This paper was presented in the International Conference at Al Mustafa International University, Qom al Muqaddas, Iran. 2018

Abstract: This paper examines the neglected practice of Inf'aaq and attempts to reconcile it with the contemporary world. This forgotten practice cannot be revived until the leaders, political as well as religious, themselves step up and generously contribute towards free education, health and other welfare activities from their own-pockets, instead of always begging or asking others round the year under different names. The mercy of Islamic financial system which is based upon justice is discussed in the Qur'an, but absent in Muslims. The doctrine of Inf'aaq is inextricably linked with Im'an and must therefore be considered together. Al Khamsat'il Ath'ar (as) and Ash'ab (ra) both extended Talim of this injunction of the Qur'an through practice.

Today when the global economy is under severe distress and is witnessing a frightening humanitarian crisis, it is important to discuss the topic of Inf'aaq in light of the Qur'an and Sunnah. According to Hans Wehr, Inf'aaq is simply: [1]

“Spending or disbursement.”

It means basically to please Allah without asking for any favour. The word Inf'aaq is mentioned once in the Qur'an, but the essential form of the verb “Anfiq” appears 18 times. The word “Al inf'aaq” [2] is used with clarity in Surah al-Isra. Inf'aaq is totally different from Zak'at, which is obligatory on Muslims, and Sadaqah, which is donation for attaining a specific reward or protection from some adverse episode. This will encourage the prosperous to fulfill this responsibility that would increase Hasan'at and save them. Qur'an says: [3]

“You shall not attain righteousness until you spend in the way of Allah ‘what you love’; and whatsoever you spend, verily, Allah knows it.”

The Arabi term “Birr” has a vast meaning which covers all good deeds irrespective of belief whereas ‘what you love’ means all that you hold dear to your heart. The term covers the spending of one's wealth and possessions, and the sacrificing of one's pride as well as the shedding of one's blood for the cause of Islam, especially when the religion of Allah and welfare of human society is in danger. A Muslim never forgets the supreme sacrifice of Moola Abi Abdillah al Husain ibn Ali (as) in Karbala for the survival of Kalimah. In fact, it was Rasulullah (S) who manifested himself through his grandson, Sayyed ush Shuhada, Al Imam al Husain ibn Ali (as) to prove his divine declaration: [4]

“Husainu Minni Wa Ana Min Husain” (Husain is from me and I am from Husain).

These are not ordinary words explaining an ordinary relation of a grandfather and a grandson, but are the sayings of that Rasul (S) for whom Allah has announced in Qur'an: [5]

“He (Rasulullah) doesn’t speak out of desire; it is not but Wahi that appears.”

Lets study full Hadith and try to understand the Inf’aq of Rasulallah(S) through Husain (as):

“Husain is from me, and I am from Husain. Allah loves whoever loves Husain. Husain is a Sibt among the Asb’at.”

This Hadith denotes that Rasulallah(S) knew well what will happen with his children after his demise. That Husain (as) will be slaughter in Karbala brutally; therefore, he wanted to show his real position as the head of Ahl al-Bayt (as) to those who hated or despised Husain (as) in the eyes of his Ummah. Through this Hadith He(S) declared that Husain(as) was part of his body, physical as well as spiritual. “He is from me” means Husain (as) is on Haq and that he will defend my Da’wah. And “I am from him” connotes each action and declaration of Husain (as) is according to the Qur’an and my Sunnah. He and I unite in the same line, the line of Islam. He is not separate from me; I am not separate from him. The word “Asb’at” mentioned in the above Hadith is the plural form of the word “Sibt” which means grandchild. The “Inf’aq” of Husain Ibn Ali (as) at Karbala is in reality the greatest “Inf’aq” of Rasulallah (S) for the Baqa of Kalimah. Therefore, Rasulallah(S) has announced that He and Husain (as) both are connected to each other through this supreme Inf’aq.

In Sirah Literature hundreds of examples are available which inspire: [6]

Abu-Talhah al Ansari had the largest number of date trees in Madinah when his garden was his most beloved possession. This garden faced Al Masjid al Nabawi wherein there was a spring with wholesome water. Sometimes Rasulallah (S) entered that garden and drank from the spring. The garden was so beautiful and splendid with a great income that people commonly spoke well of it. When the above Ayah was sent down, Abu Talhah went to Rasulallah(S) and said:

“The most beloved to me is this garden and I want to give it in the way of Allah.”

Rasulallah(S) said:

“Well done! this is a wealth which will benefit you.”

Then Rasulallah(S) continued:

“We have accepted it from you but we return it back to you in order that you give it to your own relatives as alms.”

He did so as Rasulallah(S) had ordained..

The Qur’an has instructed in clear terms that prosperous Muslims should help the needy and poverty stricken in the Ayah 10 of Surah Wad Duha. This duty involves helping to meet the needs of the poor and treating them with proper respect and affection and not disrespecting them or treating them harshly. The Qur’an guides: [7]

“An honorable word with pardon is better than a charity followed by affront. Allah is all-sufficient, most forbearing.”

This shows us that if a person is not able to help someone, for whatever reason, then they must respond to the needy with kindness. If we are not able to help others financially, we don’t have the right to shame them and demean their character.

Sirah of Al Khamsat’il Ath’ar (Muhammad, Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husain) (as) [8] is the interpretation of Qur’an – afterall they are Qur’ani Natiq (vocal Qur’an). They were very careful to abide by the principles of generosity and giving all throughout their lives. Once Amir al Mumineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as) had four Dirhams [9]. He divided them into four. He gave away one dirham for the sake of Allah by night and one dirham by day. He gave away

the third dirham secretly and the fourth openly. The following Ayah was revealed on the same occasion [10]

“As for those who spend their property by night and by day, secretly and openly, they shall have their reward from their Lord and they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.”

On the above-mentioned narration, Sayedna Abdullah ibn Abbas (ra), commenting on the following Ayah: [11]

“Men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of Allah... without measure.”

The occasion of the arrival of the Ayah was that one day Rasulullah (S) gave Ali (as) three hundred Dinars, which they had given to him as gift. Ali (as) said: [12]

I took the money and said to myself by Allah that I will give such a charity with these Dinars that Allah will accept. When I completed the night Salaat with Rasulullah (S), I took a hundred Dinars and left the Masjid. On my way, I came across a woman to whom I gave one hundred Dinars.

The following day, people said:

“Ali has given assistance to a corrupt woman!”

Ali(as) continued:

It was a great sorrow for me. That night, I performed the Tahajjud Salaat, took a hundred Dinars in my hand, left the Masjid and said to myself, “Wallah! I will give a charity which will be accepted by my Lord. I saw a man and gave away the one hundred Dinars to him.”

The following day, the people of Madinah accused:

“Ali has given away a hundred Dinars to a thief.”

Deeply saddened once again, I convinced myself, “Wallah! I will give such charity tonight that will be accepted by Allah. Accordingly, I performed my Tahajjud Salaat with Rasulullah(S) and then left the Masjid having a hundred Dinars with me. I saw a man to whom I gave the money.

The next day, the natives of Madinah said:

“Last night, Ali gave a hundred Dinars to a rich man.”

Again, I was distressed. I went to Rasulullah(S) and told him the story. He said: “O Ali! Jibrael (as) says to you: Allah has accepted your inf’aq and purified your acts. The one hundred Dinars you gave as inf’aq was put at the disposal of a corrupt woman who repented and used the money as earnings for her living. She also intends to get married with this money.”

The inf’aq of the second night went to a thief who repented thereafter and used the money for running business.

The inf’aq of the third night went to a rich man who had not paid alms for years. He went home and blamed himself saying:

“How miserly am I! Amir al Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) gave away a hundred Dinars to me while he has nothing whereas I am rich who has not paid his obligatory alms!”

Thereafter, he reconsidered his Inf’aq and put it aside.

It was for this reason that the above-mentioned Ayah was revealed.

*Once, a poor man knocked on the door of Al Imam al Hasan’s (as) house and pleaded: [13]
O grandson of Rasulullah(S)! I have nothing left which I can sell and earn money (from) in exchange. The way I look and my condition give testimony to the truth of my words. At the same time, I have a little bit of dignity left which I have preserved (for the right customer). Now that I have found you as a suitable customer, I am giving it to you!*

When the beloved son of Fatimah (as) heard this appeal, he instructed one of his servants to check how much funds are available. The servant informed that only twelve thousand dirhams were left. The Imam (as) instructed that all of it should be given to this man. Afterwards, he called that person and expressed regret, saying: We did not give you your full right, but have given you whatever we had. The Imam (as) responded in poetry what the poor man had recited in regards to selling the last shreds of his dignity:

“Take this small amount as if you have not sold anything and we have not bought something.”

Hence, the Imam preserved the honour and dignity of the poor. This Imami behavior is the epitome of Inf'aaq with others, without injuring feelings. Qur'an says: [14]

“O believers! Do not render your charity worthless by reproach and injury, like he who spends his wealth to be seen by men, and does not believe in Allah and the last day” Whenever you will face the underprivileged and are unable to help him, then at least you must speak to him with kindness.

The Qur'an imposes several conditions regarding Inf'aaq:

- i. Inf'aaq should be to seek the pleasure of Allah [15]
- ii. Inf'aaq in the way of Allah without any injury has reward. [16]
- iii. Inf'aaq should not be for the purpose of display [17]
- iv. Inf'aaq done in secrecy is better than if given openly [18]
- v. Inf'aaq should be out of Halal income [19]. A Hadith says: [20]

“A time will come when people will not care how one gains money, legally or illegally”

- vi. Inf'aaq should be given before death [21]

The benefits of monetary Inf'aaq are:

- vii. At least the same amount which has been spent will be returned. This will be the guaranteed minimum.
- viii. The return may be double the amount given [22]
- ix. The return may increase manifold [23]
- x. The return may be more than 700 times the initial amount [24]

The benefits of non-monetary Inf'aaq:

- i. It helps remove the problems of ordinary life and beyond. A Hadith says: [25]
“Verily charity appeases the wrath of Allah and eases the sufferings of death.”
- ii. It improves one's character. A Hadith says: [26]
“There are two habits which are never present together in a believer: miserliness and bad manners.”
- iii. The giver will obtain divine protection on the Day of Qayamah according to a Hadith:[27]
“A person who gives gifts so secretly that his left hand does not know what his right hand has given.”

Inf'aaq is one of those rare topics of Fiqah on whose significance all Muslim schools of thought unanimously agree. Simply speaking, the fundamental principle of Inf'aaq is that it should be done with the sole intention of earning the pleasure and happiness of Allah alone and extreme care should be taken to avoid self-glorification, because advertisement and showcase spoils the reward of Inf'aaq. This then can become the source of Az'ab because such activities of “Riya”[28] are extremely unpleasant. Propagation of Inf'aaq is allowed only when it is done for the cumulative interest of the society but not with relation of an individual. For example, when it comes to public welfare projects such as the construction of Masjid,

community hall, school, hospital and library, the announcement of Inf'aaq is allowed only to encourage and inspire others to contribute to the cause, and in time of a public-crisis when the individual act of Inf'aaq might not be sufficient, this might encourage others to contribute. Here Inf'aaq can be done openly. However, Inf'aaq which is done to help out a single individual should never be disclosed and publicised. Inf'aaq done in this manner protects society from an increase in criminal activities because not only the needs of the deprived are taken care off, it also promotes a feeling of goodwill and brotherhood.

Qura'n very emphatically asserts: [29]

"Those who horde gold and silver (Al-Kanz: the money, the Zakat of which has not been paid), and do not spend (anything out of it) for the cause of Allah, should know that their recompense will be a painful punishment."

Yet like the miserly Hamman, Shaddad, and Nimrood, todays rich have become selfish, and keep on accumulating wealth. They are consuming more and more while the spiritual and moral quality of their lives keeps on declining. Stinginess is a sign of over attachment to this transient world. It hinders one from decorating oneself with virtues like charity, munificence, altruism and helping others. It is for this reason that Rasulallah(S) has said: [30]

"No miser shall enter Paradise."

Amir al Mumineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as) explained the habit of Jaud which is interlinked with Inf'aaq in a verse available in his Diw'an: [31]

"Al Jaudu Zaynun Lil-wara; Wal Bakhlu Aarun Fil Arab"

Generosity is decor for the people whilst miserliness is a blemish in Arabs.

Another place he says: [32]

"I am suprised to see a miserly man who craves for poverty which he tried to flee from, and fosakes the riches that he yearned for, as he passes his life here like a pauper and stands in hereafter accountable as a wealthy one."

Islam does not allow anyone to gain at the cost of others, much less at the cost of the entire society. The interests of the society must be prioritized over the interests of the individual. I am closing this discussion on the verses of Sayedna Nasir Khusraw, one of the foremost poets of the Farsi language and a major Ismaili intellectual and Da'i. Celebrated for his literary prowess that combines art with philosophy, and trusted for his mastery over theological texts, he remains one of the most fascinating figures in Islamic history and literature. He taught us to refine ourselves like a lustrous ruby, which although not easy, is achievable: [33]

However it doesn't matter where we are,

Sometimes we're in bad places;

But no one values a ruby less for coming out of dirty soil

And no one criticises roses for coming out of manure.

So we all are like a ruby and like a rose.

We need to blossom and shine wherever we are.

Select Bibliography and Short Notes:

- 1). Hans Wehr: He was a German Arabist professor at the University of Munster from 1957–1974 who published the Arabisches Worterbuch, which was later published in an English edition as a Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic.
- 2). “Al Inf’aq”, Ayah 100: Surah al-Isra-17
- 3). Ayah 92: Surah Ali Imr’an-3
- 4). The above mentioned Hadith was classed as Hasan by at-Tirmidhi and al-Albaani. Manaqib, 31; Majmauz-Zawaid, 9/181.
- 5). Ayah 3: Surah al Najam-53
- 6). Sahih Bukhari, vol. 4, P.395, Kit’ab al Wasaya, 623, Beirut, Lebanon 1987
- 7). Ayah 263: Surah al Baqarah-2
- 8). “Al Khamsat’il Ath’ar”: Mohammad, Ali, Fatimah, Hasan, Husain. They are known in Farsi and Urdu as “Panj-e-Tan”. The Walayah of these Five is Fard, and Bara’at from their enemies is Wajib, while enmity with them is a confirmed licence to Jahannam. Only they are Ash’ab al Tathir, Ahl al Kisa, and Salaw’at in Salaat is recited upon them and upon the Imam from the lineage of Moula Abi Abdillah al Husain (as).
- 9). Al Manaqib, P. 74, vol. 2
- 10). Ayah 274: Surah al Baqarah-2
- 11). Ayah 37-38: Surah al Noor-24
- 12). Tafsir, Sayedna Abdullah Ibn Abbas (ra): He was one of the sincere Ash’ab and students of Amir al Mumineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as). His Tafsir is famous but authenticity of its current version is highly doubtful. Authentic manuscript is not available for study and research. Some primary sources quoted some passages which offer readers valuable insight into the circulation and exchange of popular ideas between Islam, Judaism and Christianity during the formative phase of exegesis of Qur’an.
- 13). Muntahal Aam’al, vol.1, P.162
- 14). Ayah 264: Surah al Baqarah-2
- 15). Ayah 177: Surah al Baqarah-2
- 16). Ayah 262: Surah al Baqarah-2
- 17). Ayah 264: Surah al Baqarah-2
- 18). Ayah 271: Surah al Baqarah-2
- 19). Ayah 267: Surah al Baqarah-2
- 20). Hadith, Bukhari
- 21). Ayah 10: Surah al Munafiqun-63
- 22). Ayah 54: Surah Al Qasas-28
- 23). Ayah 39: Surah al Rum-30
- 24). Ayah 261: Surah al Baqarah-2
- 25). Hadith, Tirmadhi
- 26). Hadith, Tirmadhi
- 27). Hadith, Bukhari
- 28). “Riya”: It means showing off and pretending to do good. According to Ayah of the Qur’an, show off in Salaat is amongst the characteristics of Munafiq. Riya is Har’am but our politicians and religious leaders both specialize in this Har’am act.
- 29). Ayah 34: Surah Taubah/Bara’at-9
- 30). Hadith Maruf

- 31). *Diw'an, Amir al Mumineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as).*
- 32). *Kalam, Amir al Mumineen, Ali Ibn Abi Talib(as), Nahj ul Balagha*
- 33). *Diw'an, Sayedna Nasir Khusraw, is a collection of poems written and compiled by the great Da'i. He composed most of his poems in the valley of Yumgan, a remote mountainous region in Badakhshan. The Diw'an contains around 11,000 verses, reflecting philosophical, religious, Tawil, Haqaiq and personal themes.*

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