

## 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 the last portion of the prayer of Moses when he took seventy men to the place he met with God, and they “*Were seized with violent quaking*”:

*“And ordain for us  
That which is good,  
In this life  
And in the Hereafter:  
For we have turned unto Thee.”  
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, and those  
Who believe in Our Signs; –  
(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*”:

*It is He who produceth  
Gardens, with trellises  
And without, and dates,*

*And tilth with produce  
Of all kinds, and olives  
And pomegranates,  
Similar (in kind)  
And different (in variety):  
Eat of their fruit  
In their season, but render  
The dues that are proper  
On the day that the harvest  
Is gathered. But waste not  
By excess: for God  
Loveth not the wasters.  
(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 will 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."  
Any good you do, God is fully aware thereof.  
(Quran: The Final Testament 2:215)*

God requires us 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:

*And whatever ye spend  
In charity or devotion,  
Be sure God knows it all.  
But the wrong-doers  
Have no helpers.  
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. And God  
Is well acquainted  
With what ye do.  
(The Holy Quran II:270-1 [2:270-1])*

So it is best to give anonymously. Thus the charity remits your sins. However, though it is good to give to charity, 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.