

Zakat



Zakat explained from the point of view of a Sunni Muslim.

I think Zakat is the pillar of Islam that most non-Muslims understand most. I suppose it is because people, whether they are religious or not, understand the value of helping other people. Even if you don't believe that God judges you for it you can still very well see that making another person suffer less has to be a positive thing both because it makes for a fairer society in which those people who have more money help those who have less but also because helping people tends to relieve people of their own psychological difficulties. Having worked with people who have mental health issues at different times in my life, I have found that particularly if a person has depression then you can help alleviate the symptoms by encouraging them to do selfless acts for other people. People with depression often find that they feel worthless in themselves but still value other people and selfless giving helps raise them out of the pit that they had fallen into, it is like a medicine.

As a Muslim, I don't think it is just like a medicine really. I think it is part of the natural order that Allah created. If you submit to Him and everything He has created for you and instructed you to do, you will see that zakat, or any giving, is a pleasure and an honour for you. When you give, Allah sends blessings on you and your good deeds in this help you on your passage to the akhirah. When I have the opportunity to make my charitable donations I feel grateful to the recipient who has allowed me this opportunity and I feel grateful to Allah who has told me clearly that this is of benefit to me.

But people's dark or animal side tends towards hoarding and 'looking after number one'. But this never makes people happy or satisfied. It makes them dark, both inside but also it acts and an estrangement from society and a distancing from Allah. All of this causes difficulties to descend.

In my experience, I have never given anything that I have not found is returned to me by Allah and then some. Allah is so Merciful. He instructs you to give, but he knows that that takes some level of belief and compassion from you and He returns to you whatever you give out in charity, as long as you do it in His name.

It so happens that I have never been in a position to give zakat. The reason for this is I earn enough money, but I do not earn enough money to save and savings is all that zakat is drawn from. It is simply 2.5% of savings that you have had laying idle for a year. So if you have £1000 in the bank it will be £25 in zakat. If you want to give charity but do not have savings, that is fine, but that is called sadaqah not zakat. Zakat is effectively a tax on the more wealthy people; the people who can afford it. Many people actually say that if the very richest people of the world were to pay zakat then many of the Earth's problems could be resolved without actually causing those rich people to become any less rich!

I look forward to one day being in a position to pay my zakat inshaAllah but in the meantime I am grateful to be able to help where I can and give money when I have enough to those who need it. It is also important that 'the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing' meaning that you give your charity and zakat privately and do not make the recipient feel bad about it. You should not expect thanks for your charity.

Task: Read the account of zakat

All: Explain what zakat is.

Most: Explain the reasons why zakat is beneficial.

Some: Reflect upon whether you would give sadaqah even if you didn't need to give zakat.