

Ethico-Spiritual Dimensions of Charity: An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract: Benevolence known in Islam as sadaqa is an integral component of Muslim religiosity. Muslims are generally accustomed to giving away charity as sign of religious devotion and care of the poor and needy in society. Yet while the significance of giving is a common practice in Muslim societies, the understanding of its ethico-spiritual dimensions is not; and requires further research. This paper sheds light on the multifaceted nature of sadaqa and how it is perceived not only as a means of spiritual purification, but also as factor of building socio-economic sustainability. This research draws on Islamic literature pertaining to the concepts, norms and laws of sadaqa in Islam to provide a conceptual framework of analysis of charity and its respective practice in Islam and thus supplies researchers with the perspective necessary for further interpretation and analysis on Islamic philanthropy.

Key words: Islamic Charity • Sadaqa • Muslim philanthropy • Needy • Ethics of giving

INTRODUCTION

Bonner argues that a set of concepts clustering around poverty and charity have remained essential elements for understanding and expression the norms that have governed much of the Middle Eastern life [1]. The culture of giving charity (sadaqa) plays a key and central role in the religious and socio-cultural fabric of Muslim life. To a great extent, this comes as a direct result of Muslims' interaction with their religious literature which is replete with exhortations to spend generously on the needy and showcase thankfulness to God while enjoying the blessings of life. Muslims are commanded to enjoy life while observing piety in moderation, humility and compassion. The Qur'an reinforces a great many of these concepts of Muslim life, affirming: "It is not your wealth nor your sons, that will bring you nearer to Us in degree: but only those who believe and work righteousness, these are the ones for whom there is a multiplied Reward for their deeds, while secure they (reside) in the dwellings on high!" (Qur'an, 34: 37).

Islam however, strongly objects to extravagance while resisting the conception that material possessions serve as a means to preventing against one's destruction and peril. Wealth in Islam is viewed originally not as a natural means to achieving noble or worthy goals, or ranking as the ultimate end of life; it is rather to be used in such a way that the intrinsic humanity of humans is beautifully and positively expressed. This is perhaps the reason why the Qur'an bluntly reprimands those who see power only in terms of wealth and offspring; with the Qur'an states effectually stating: "They said: "We have more in wealth and in sons and we cannot be punished" (Qur'an, 34: 35). The cultivated mental attitude and lifestyle of modesty is better illustrated in the following tradition reported of the Prophet Muhammad: "Eat and give charity and dress up but not in an extravagant manner or to show off" [2].

In the following section, we explore the position of sadaqa (voluntary almsgiving/charity) in the system of Islamic faith and practice; and further elaborate on how it confirms and validates faith in God and stands as a proof

of social responsibility; while touching on the guidelines and parameters that Islam establishes for the act of giving or receiving sadaqa. The discussion of these issues however, should be approached from within a broader perspective of analysis; according to which wealth is viewed as a gift and test from God. With this sentiment in mind, sadaqa is thus perceived as a natural philanthropist behaviour and furthermore as an act of social responsibility and justice. The Qur'an attests to such a meaning: "Believe in God and His Messenger and spend (in charity) out of the (substance) whereof He has made you heirs. For, those of you who believe and spend (in charity); for them is a great Reward" (Qur'an, 57: 7). Thus, charity expresses the assured belief that God loves and cherishes those who give and underlines a deeper underlying sincere commitment to the commands of God, as well as the focused emulation of the names and attributes of the divine. Interestingly enough, the Qur'an describes charity in general as a 'beautiful loan to God' not merely to point towards its rewarding nature, but to further motivate and exhort Muslims towards sustainable giving and sharing (Quran, 57: 11).

Sadaqa derives from the word '*sadaqa*' meaning honest and truthful, which effectively implies that the act of giving to the poor and needy confirms one's genuine servitude and devotion to God. However, the basic concept of sadaqa means to give and to help without anticipating any form of compensation or favour in return; while also holding the sincere intent of pleasing God alone. Generally however, sadaqa denotes any activity of spending for the sake God, as is broadly illustrated and described in the terms of the following hadith "Every good deed is a charity" [3]. Sadaqa also seeks to assist others towards gaining independence. This meaning of sadaqa is inherently reflected in the following tradition: "The needy is not he who asks people, upon which they give him one or two morsels or one or two dates. The companions asked: "Who is he then?" Prophet responded: "He is the person who does not find a rich person to give him enough to enrich him [the giver]; or one aware of his troubles and provides for him in charity; because he does not ask others for help" [4]. Sadaqa is nonetheless voluntary, while zakat is obligatory. Sadaqa thus also encompasses the compulsory charity known as zakat as stated in the Qur'an (9:103) and sometimes connotes any act of endowment (*waqf*) established for the public interest as seen in the following saying of the Prophet: "If you like, you can give the land as an endowment and give its fruits in charity". Other terms in use for charity include '*atakhayri*' (charitable giving),

zakat or '*ushur*' (religious tithing among Muslims and Christians), *birr* or *mabarra* (good works) or zakat and sadaqa (obligatory and voluntary beneficence) [5].

Ethical Dimensions of Sadaqa

On the Sources and Quality of Charity: According to Muslim traditions, the religious merit of charity begins not with giving it in nor ends with passing it on to the poor or needy; it rather begins at a much earlier stage and effectively speaking, knows no closing chapter. It invokes a series of moral pre-requisites that begins with the process of generating wealth and accumulating resources, distributing and sharing, while adhering to a code of ethics throughout. Islam places due ethical attention on the process of wealth building as well as on the accumulated pure financial resources known in Islam as *tayyib*; as illustrated in the following traditions of the Prophet Muhammad: "O people! Allah is good and accepts only good" [6] and "If one gives a date bought from honestly earned money (and God accepts only good), God accepts it in His right hand and enlarges [its rewards] for its owner (as one rears his foal) until it becomes as big as a mountain" [7]. Muslims may only spend from legitimate sources of wealth, or otherwise lose all anticipated spiritual rewards or self-purification.

Islam strongly encourages its followers to earn and spend from lawful sources and to continually earn their livelihoods according to legitimate means while further balancing the acceptance or rejection of religious supplication according to the legitimacy of the sources of income. The following narrations for instance, forge a link between charity and God's pleasure and acceptance while showing how the Muslim should seek to emulate the divine attributes in all of his conditions: "God is pure and only accepts what is pure" and "God does not accept any prayer without purification and He does not accept any charity from *ghalul*" [8]. The *ghalul* is an example of unlawful earning and possession; the use of which for charity would cause it to be devoid of reward due to the violation and injustice affecting society in the process of its accumulation. To properly ensure financial accountability however, Islam set rules and regulations safeguarding charity from abuse and manipulation. Appointed zakat agents (*sa'is*) must abide by legal and juridical procedures. The substitution of endowed assets is permissible according to a number of juridical opinions, yet under regulations ensuring fairness and justice. Among such regulations is the presence of the trustworthy juridical authority, the collective decision concerning an assessment of the actual state of the

endowment or the need for substitution, as well as the agreement of the wise people in the community to whom the endowment belongs.

Along the same line of religious reasoning and in conformity with traditions the un-rewarding nature of charity made from unlawful sources such as “He who acquires a *haram* income shall have no rewards for it and will be sinful”; Ibn ‘Abd al-Salam (d.1227), in a chapter entitled ‘Avoiding Doubts in Charity’ [9] sought to establish the evidence of prohibition for the use of unlawful wealth for causes of charity. He maintained that doubt (*shubha*) should be actively avoided in charity and excluded from all acts of religious devotion [10]. As such, Muslims are commanded to behave with nobility and honour while benefiting from lawful sources of wealth. For Ibn al-Qayyim (d.1350), lawful profits have the added benefits of gaining and expanding, exercise a significant impact on faith, enlighten the inner, support the building of a healthy body; open up the chest and are key reasons for the answering of supplications.

Alternatively, Muslim scholars have addressed the question of charity given from illegal earnings (*haram*). They collectively ruled that charity stemming from wealth derived from gambling, the sale of alcohol, cheating or deception in business falls within the folds of immorality and are hence an unethical means of spending. This theological stance not only sustains Muslims’ financial awareness on the necessity to integrate piety with business and finance, but also point to the need to maintain harmony in all of the religious and mundane aspects of Muslim life. As such, Muslims are urged to invest in genuine forms of business so as to ensure *halal* sources of charity. Islamic jurisprudence is replete with rules and principles with regard to the need to adhere to genuine modes of living for noble ends, such as giving in charity as in the following prominent established legal principle: noble means for noble ends (*afdal al-wasa’ililaafdal al-maqasid*). Equally important is for giving in charity from one’s best quality of wealth and possessions, as instructed in the following verse of the Qur’an: “By no means shall you attain righteousness unless you give (freely) of that which you love; and whatever you give, of a truth God knows it well” (Qur’an, 3:92). The good selection of charity acts as a proof of one’s true love and devotion to God. Similarly, Muslim need to give charity from their own makings and earnings. This perhaps, is to likely encourage Muslims to strive for living and depending on their own works and actions in the practice of religiosity and solidarity. This is as per the instructions of Prophet Muhammad: “The best

earning is that which your hands have earned; whenever a man spends on himself, or his family, children and servant, it is considered as a charity for him” [11].

Ethical Code of Giving and Receiving Charity

Ethics of Giving Charity: Islam lays down a specific ethical code of giving which is congruently aligned with the philosophy and goals of charity. In it, charity should be spent wholeheartedly, with modesty and not as an act of favour to others. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: “The reward of spending one dirham can exceed the reward of one hundred thousand Dirhams;’ i.e. the reward of one who spends wholeheartedly and unrestrictedly will be multiplied manifold in contrast to one who does not do so” [11]. Such an emotional state in turn requires Muslims to self-consciously counsel their deeper feelings and self-interest in reputation and popularity. Charity cannot be used as a means of publicity or advertising for one’s own business or interest, nor should it’s recipient be compelled to fulfill self-imposed external conditions.

Sadaqa transcends the boundaries of cultural, ethnic and religious discrimination; and is rather regulated through an objective criterion by means of which emotional, economic and political interests are dismissed in the giving process. Charity for instance should be given to followers of other faiths. According to Islamic law, giving in charity to non-Muslims is deemed as praiseworthy and rewarding. This understanding is supported by the following Qur’anic verse: “And they feed, for His love, the indigent, orphan and captive” (Qur’an, 77: 6). The tradition of Prophet Muhammad also supports this instruction as seen in the following report of Asma, the daughter of Abu Bakr, who relates, “My mother came to me and she is a polytheist. I said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, If my mother came to me and she is willing, do I establish a link with her?’ He said: ‘Yes, establish a link with your mother” [12].

One of the more deeply striking features of sadaqa is the secrecy which so characterizes it. Islam exhorts its followers to give secretly, perhaps in order to maintain the effective attention to devotion and self-purification, in addition to protecting the dignity and reputation of those receiving it from public eyes. The Qur’an is the primary source of these details: “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 Allah is well acquainted with what ye do” (Qur’an, 2: 271). The Sunnah also underscores this meaning well.

Prophet Muhammad is reported to have stated that one of the seven categories of people who will be protected and honoured on the Day of Judgment is the individual who gives charity in secret, in such a manner that his left hand does not know what his right hand is spending [13]. Ibn 'Abd al-Salam states: "Hiding sadaqa is better than showing it off. This applies to those who cannot be sure from show off (*riya'*) and for those who are safe from [the feeling] of showing off, but if they show it, people would follow them [9]". In his *al-Ihya*, Ghazali(d. 1111) deeply discusses the state of Sadaqa at length, granting special attention to the ways the giver should perceive his own charity. He said:

"If you should, then, say that such an expectation is very indefinite and obscure and that the heart of no one is free from it and ask what remedy may be used for it, then know that it has both an internal and an external remedy. The internal remedy is to know the truths which we have already mentioned concerning the obligatory nature [of the zakah] and to realize that the poverty-stricken man, by his acceptance of the zakah, enables the benefactor to purify himself [before God] and is therefore the real benefactor [14].

As a natural consequence of sincere giving, charity needs to be free from all negative '*reminders of generosity*'. In fact, the Qur'an forewarns against such behaviour as in the following verse: "O ye who believe! Cancel not your charity by reminders of your generosity or by injury, like those who spend their substance to be seen of men, but believe neither in Allah nor in the Last Day (Qur'an, 2: 263)". Donors are therefore required to be thankful to the recipient of charity for their kind willingness to accept their charitable deeds. Muslim jurists however, disagree as to whether the Muslim should publicly give sadaqa, or if it is better to hide it. Some argue that voluntary charity is far better given in hidden, unlike the obligatory charity (zakah) which is required to be publicly shown.

From another note, Islamic traditions are found to describe prayers and invocations made by recipients of charity as both sound and answered. This in turn has led some Muslim scholars to advise those giving charity to request the recipient for supplication and prayers. Muslims are not allowed to turn back in their charity; and under no circumstances should Muslims be allowed to change their minds or cease their act of charity. Should they decide to drop their charity, they would then consequently waive all anticipated rewards. Similarly,

Muslims should not drive away beggars nor hurt their feelings for the act of asking for charity and this is perceived as a test from God for those givers. The Qur'an confirms this standpoint: "Have you seen him who belies the rewards and punishments of the Hereafter? It is he who drives away the orphan and does not urge giving away the food of the poor. (107:1 - 3)" and "Give to the near of kin his due and also to the needy and the wayfarers. Do not squander your wealth wastefully; for those who squander wastefully are Satan's brothers and Satan is ever ungrateful to his Lord." (17:26 - 27).

Ethics of Receiving Charity: Islam sets a number of ethical guidelines for the receiving of charity likely to properly sustain a comprehensive degree of harmony affecting the complete process of charity and to further support its anticipated spiritual, emotional and socio-economic purposes. Islam fundamentally discourages begging or asking for help; and instead praises work and independence. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "The upper hand is better than the lower hand and that furthermore, whosoever abstains from asking others for financial help, then Allah will give him and save him from asking others; Allah will make him self-sufficient [15]. In Chapter 2:273 of the Qur'an a special reference is made to a group of poor Muslim who out of their modesty appear rich and having no need: "Charity is for those in need, who, in Allah's cause are restricted (from travel) and cannot move about in the land, seeking (For trade or work): the ignorant man thinks, because of their modesty, that they are free from want. You shall know them by their (Unfailing) mark: They beg not importunately from all the sundry." This group of poor known as '*ahl al-suffah*' lived in the area of the Mosque of Medina in the city of Medina. They are reported to have maintained a decent outlook and despite their pressing and dire need for help; opted not to ask people for help. Another etiquette emphasized in the context of charity is the expression of thanks, which is mentioned in the hadith: "Whoever does not thank people, does not thank Allah" [16]. This formula of good words is further detailed in a hadith as with the following: "To whom a good deed is done and who says to its doer: 'May Allah reward you with goodness,' also reaps the reward" [12].

Zones and Priorities of Sadaqa: Islam seeks to maintain a moderate charitable atmosphere in society, while fulfilling the gradual economic needs of society. First Islam precisely identifies the closest legitimate zones of giving,

such as debt until resolved, calamity that destroys one's holdings and poverty and need. Charity however moves from the nearest circles outwards; as described in the following tradition: "When one of you is poor, he starts with himself. If anything is left, he spends it on his dependents. If anything is (still left) then on his relatives and then, if more is left, he spends it here and there." Such zones of giving are well illustrated in the following tradition in which Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "Give sadaqah." A man said: "I have a dinar." He responded accordingly: "Give it to yourself as sadaqah." He said: "I have another dinar." He replied: "Give it to your wife as sadaqah." He said: "I have another dinar." He replied: "Give it to your child as sadaqah." He said: "I have another dinar." He replied: "Give it to your servant as sadaqah." He said: "I have another dinar." He thus replied: "You would be able to assess better [to whom to give it] [17]". It is with such a spirit of moderation that a Muslim should dispose of their wealth. This raises the pressing question of giving away all of one's wealth or property. Muslim jurists argue that giving all of one's property in charity is lawful provided the giver is fit, capable of earning, not in a state of indebtedness and does not have dependents in need of support; otherwise the charity would be found reprehensible. Prophet Muhammad said: "One of you comes with all his of property to make charity, then sits [by the road] begging from the people. Sadaqah is given by the one who is rich" [16].

Yet while Islam encourages and exhorts Muslims to give charity as a deed of piety and devotion to God, it also ensures shuts the door against disposing of other's properties. For instance, charity made by the interdicted due to prodigality (*mahjur*) or a drunken state is void, be it sadaqa, endowment, or indeed any others form of charity. Muslims for instance, are not allowed to dispose of other's wealth or properties without consent. The case of a wife in Islamic law however, makes an exception in light of traditions of the Prophet who made concessions to women to give charity from their husband's wealth, in accordance with the prevalent customs of giving. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "When a woman gives in charity from her husband's meals without wasting the property of her husband, she will receive a reward for it and her husband too will get a reward for what he earned and the store-keeper will have the reward likewise" [15]. This may perhaps be seen as a direct invitation to maximizing charity and philanthropy on a much broader and larger social scale. It is reported that Prophet Muhammad said: "According to Abdullah

IbnZubayr, "I have not seen anyone more generous than my mother Asma." Zubayr was a bit harsh, so one day Asma' asked the Prophet, "O Allah's Messenger, can I give something to the orphans and the destitute from the wealth of Zubayr without his permission?" The Prophet told her that she could." In his discussion of this tradition, IbnHajar (d.1448) argues that the Prophet allowed Asma to give charity from her husband's earning moderately, so long as she is able to do so [2]. IbnQudamah (1223) holds a similar opinion, known today as the legal opinion of Imam Ahmad.

Interestingly, provisions provided to families are also deemed a charity resulting in immense rewards. This religious meaning likely seeks to direct Muslims' attention to the most common zones of generosity and care; which include one's household. The Prophet's tradition illustrates this point: "There is nothing better than the earning that we earn with our own hands; and whatever the man spends on himself, or family or children or servant, it is written for him as charity" [15]. Islam expands the notion of sadaqa beyond mere monetary transactions so as to tap into the vast reservoir of human capital available within society and to recapture and safeguard the genuine attitude of human charity which makes itself manifest in the positive emotional and mental attitude of helping others. The Islamic perspective sits comfortably within the broader consensus of opinion about poverty as a multi-dimensional issue; as it is based on human needs that cannot be reflected in monetary terms alone [18]. As a result, it is perhaps through reinforcing this essential human attribute that other charitable acts would naturally and gradually be revived and sustained. On the other hand, the expansion of the scope of charity also highlights a critical aspect of philanthropy in Islam; which is namely the richly diversified channels of changing conditions that are not necessarily confined to finance. The following tradition highlights the above underlined meanings; "A Muslim does not plant or sow anything from which a person, an animal, or anything eats but it is considered as sadaqah from him" [13].

Islam also addresses a series of hypothetical scenarios of human conditions in reference to the potential of giving charity. This applies to the different conditions of human abilities and capabilities. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "Every Muslim has to give sadaqah." The people then asked: "O Prophet of Allah, what about the one who has nothing?" He said: "He should work with his hands to give sadaqah." They asked: "If he cannot find [work]?"

He replied: "He should help the needy who asks for help." They asked: "If he cannot do that?" He replied: "He should then do good deeds and shun evil, for this will be taken as sadaqah". This goes in line with the Shari'a objectives and the Islamic preference made between human acts and their arrangement according to their respective degree of benefits and advantages, on the internal or external fronts. Acts are thus categorized according to a scale of priority congruent with the *maqasid*, while simultaneously supporting the sense of family as a building core of society. The fulfillment of human needs in Islam, namely (a) Religion, (b) Physical self, (c) Intellect or Knowledge, (d) Offspring & Family and (e) Wealth is considered one of the basic goals of Islam [18]. According to the Islamic teaching, Muslims are only allowed to give in charity more than one third of their wealth because their family and relatives hold financial rights over them as well. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "And that you leave your heirs prosperous is better than to leave them (poor and) begging from people" [13]. Seen from a macro-perspective, careful planning is required to be in place in order to ensure a better and brighter economic future.

Muslims are also urged to exercise kindness to the *next-of-kin* as outlined in the following Qur'anic verse: "It is prescribed, when death approaches any of you, if he leaves any goods that he makes a bequest to parents and next of kin, according to reasonable usage; this is due from the Allah-fearing" (Qur'an, 2:180). This Qur'anic passage raises interest in good will, benevolence, charity and philanthropy, which under such a sentiment ought to be extended to further levels and stages of sustainability. It thus becomes critical to extend charities to the more immediate rather than farther circles of needs, which require Muslims' contributions to travel outwardly, in light of the major needs of the community. This is justifiable in light of the fact that when immediate and local needs are first properly addressed, then for the most part, the greater community would no longer be in need in view of having their needs met by their family members.

For charity to play its socio-economic role in development, Islam sets for it a number of regulations tackling the priority of the needy and local needs, as opposed to the farther areas of distribution. Al-'Izz Ibn 'Abd al-Salam discussed the charity given to address local needs, stating: "Priority of charity and spending should be on one's household and relatives." This was clearly drawn from the following traditions: "A dinar you

have spent for the sake of God, a dinar to free a slave, a dinar for a needy and dinar you have spent on your family. The one you have spent on your family is the highest in reward. [19]" and "To give something to a poor man brings one reward, while giving the same to a needy relation brings two: one for charity and the other for respecting the family ties" [20]. Along the line of a number of narrations however, Ibn 'Abdul Salam said: "Kindness to closest relatives is the best of all, then the closest ones (*al-aqrabfalaqrab*); the reason why it commands to be kind to parents, then the closer ones (*al-adnafaladna*)" [9]". As far as relocating collected charity from one area to another, Qurtubi (d.1273) draws on three prominent opinions which vary between the disfavour of transfer of zakat to other places except in cases of necessity (*darurah*) and permissibility. It appears however, that the core of the debate revolves around the question of necessity and need.

Ethical Scale of Sustainability: Concern over long-term sustainability was first publicly voiced in the Brutlands Commission report, published in 1978, which loosely defined development as that which "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" [21]. In practical terms, sustaining development draws on the function of values and beliefs, as well as the roles and practices of individuals and communities. This is what probably caused scholars to argue that the challenges for designing institutions for sustainability are complicated by virtue of the fact that societies embody existing sets of deeply entrenched rules and roles. Creating a more sustainable world therefore not only involves changing how natural resources are used and allocated, but also understanding that the rules and roles of a particular society or social group are decisive in reshaping values and institutions that have been moulded by generations of increasing materialistic affluence [21]. In this section, we explore the position of Sadaqa on the scale of sustainability; and in what ways does the practice of charity enhance the vision of sustainability; and furthermore how is sustainable planning deficient when education on charity is neglected. One of the primary religious Islamic texts, which points to a sense of sustainable impact is that which speaks of 'Sadaqa *jariyah*': the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said, "When a person dies [the benefit] of his deeds end, except for three: a continuous sadaqah, knowledge from which benefit is derived, or a pious child invoking Allah for him [13]".

The diversified nature and wide range of Sadaqa is seen in specific usage of the word *ma'ruf*, which stands for every kind of virtue and good deeds and any good expression, as well as abstaining from committing evil, feeding and doing all forms of benefaction for others; significantly enhancing the position and impact of Sadaqa on sustainable development. The following hadith substantiates this perspective: "Giving in charity is an obligation upon every Muslim." It was said (to him): "What about one who does not find (the means) to do so?" He said, "Let him work with his hands, thus doing benefit to himself and give in charity." It was said to him: "What if he does not have (the means) to do so?" He said, "Then let him assist the needy, the aggrieved." It was said: "What about if he cannot even do this?" He said, "Then he should enjoin good." He was asked: "What if he cannot do that?" He said, "He should then abstain from evil, for verily, that is a charity from him [13]."

As stated earlier however, the scope of sadaqa transcends the simple forms of financial assistance and instead embraces all that improves the living conditions of society both in the present and the future. This is justified by the principle that all good deeds are viewed as genuine acts of charity as per the following Qur'anic verse: "And whatsoever you spend of anything (in Allah's Cause), He will replace it" (34:39). Knowledge is nonetheless viewed as the best running charity in Islam. Muslims are urged to learn, teach and share knowledge. This is particularly understandable in view of the fact that knowledge is a light which guides to the truth. In turn, Islam places a rather high reward for sustaining useful learning '*ilmnafi*' which includes good acts such as teaching and sponsoring of students, printing and distributing of books, as well as the endowing of buildings and lands to set up colleges, libraries and Mosques. Moreover, the reward for teachers is proportionate with students' benefiting from their knowledge and sharing it with others.

The multiplied function of continuous reward of sadaqa exemplifies Islam's interest in the sustainable effect of education and subsequent empowering of communities, which rests at the very center of any sustainable agenda of change. In line with some of the traditions highlighted earlier with regards to the broad spectrum of charity, the following spells out a number of the layers inherent within sadaqa-based human empowerment. One of the companions is reported to have asked Prophet Muhammad: what would save a person

from Hell. He replied: "Faith in God." The companion asked: "Should there be a deed beside faith?" The Prophet said: "To spend from what God has given him." The companion asked: "What if that person were poor and had nothing to give?" The Prophet said: "He should then enjoin goodness and forbid evil." He said: "What if he not good with that?" The Prophet said: He should help who is unskilful (*akhraq*)." The companion said: "What if he was himself unskilful?" The Prophet said: "So you wish to leave that man with no goodness or advantage? He should then distance himself from harming others." The companion then asked his final question: "Will he enter paradise if he does that?" Prophet answered: "Any Muslim with one of the above qualities should enter Paradise" [3].

Sharing of learning, skills and talents thereby plays an integral part of sadaqa and may even surpass the effects of financial donations in view of the sustainable effects which result from the building and development of human capital. In fact, according to Islamic law the charity reward index is set in view of its resulting positive societal impacts. In other words the deeper and the more sustaining the effects of Sadaqa are, then the more highly rewarding they would become in the scale of giving. This index is better understood in relation to the realization of the five fundamentals of Shari'ah, which are respectively the preservation of religion, life, progeny, wealth and intellect. The scale of sadaqa sustainability is thus measured according to its impact on the scheme of those five fundamental Shari'ah values. Ibn 'Abd al-Salam was aware of this critical dimension when he said: "The merits of actions and deeds vary according to the resulting interests and repelled harms; knowledge and faith are thus considered to be the highest forms of deeds because their interests are found to be complete" [9].

The various forms of charity also display a deeper orientation towards building a sustainable environment, such as in the case of donating water as per the instruction of the Prophet Muhammad: "The best charity is to provide water" while current philanthropy remains strongly grounded in religious frameworks, in some cases, its becoming more strategic in its aims, utilizing resources effectively to address the underlying causes of social problems and ultimately to resolve them [5]. Islam's commitment to environmental responsibility is made manifest through its engagement with nature and wildlife conservation in the shape of the *harim and hima* zones as in the case of maintaining protective zones around springs and water courses, where no settlements are

permitted, in order to preserve water from contamination. Another interesting dimension of sustainability is

Muslims' ability to regenerate *mawat* [virgin land]. According to Abu al-Naja, the *mawat* [virgin land] is a land free from specific usage or rights of proprietorship. Whoever regenerates it, be they Muslim or not, with or without the permission of the Imam (Caliph) and within the Muslim territories or not would effectively own it. He, who besieges such a land, digs a well, runs a course of water to it, or prevents the land from submersion under water to cultivate it, would have thereby revived it [22]. Muslims are encouraged to dedicate endowments, whether for land lease (*ijarah*) for the sake of development; conservation/reservation zones (*hýma*); forbidden zones (*harim*) which may be set adjacent to sources of water and other utilities as in the case of roads and places of public resort; the planting and protection of trees; and other charitable endowments (*waqf*) set for specific conservation objectives [23]. Islam firmly establishes the principle of sharing basic natural resources, including access to and distribution of resources such as the rights of protection and conservation of water, vegetation (*kala'*) covering all ranges of plants and fire as with minerals and mined fuels. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "People are partners in three; water, vegetation and fire" [16].

Alleviating the hardship of the needy and empowering them contributes to a healthier civic society. Since sadaqa is less structured; it has recently been explored as a way to extend Muslim civil society organization and works towards more development oriented approaches and support for art, or environmental protection [5]. Muslim debtors are encouraged to delay payment or release the indebted altogether, which is known in Islam as '*inzar al-mu'sir*'. Every passing day in patience for the debtor's payment is considered as a charity [24]. As such, sadaqa contributes to the building of sustainable human relations, thus forging effective communities stirred towards common visions of sustainability. Developing sustainable alliances requires Muslims to first attend to the primary needs of their close religious communities prior to looking further. This concept is repetitively impressed on in a many traditions such as the following: "The best of all charity is that which is given to the relative who harbours enmity against you" [11].

Sustaining spirituality and emotional wellness is a charity. Interestingly, feeding one's spouse, as well as legitimate sexual intimacy also amount to nothing less

than a charity. Adhering to a neutral state in society, in which one causes no harm to others, is also a form of charity.

Similarly, sadaqa is seen as an act of goodness to humans and animals alike. The Prophet's general statement "There is a reward for every live animal"[15] perhaps alludes to a universal inclusion. First, along such a parallel, Muslims are instructed to give charity to people of other faith groups as reported in that the Prophet and his companions used to share their dinner with their non-Muslim neighbours. The second caliph 'Umar (d.644), also issued a law to sustain non-Muslims in their old age. IbnQudamah states that non-Muslims are entitled to any type of non-compulsory charity. On the other hand, the endowment of animals by Muslims stands as an act of general goodness. These concepts find support in many traditions such as the following: "While a man was walking along a road, he became very thirsty and found a well. He lowered himself into the well, drank and came out. Then [he saw] a dog protruding its tongue from thirst. The man said: This dog has become exhausted from thirst in the same way as I. He lowered himself into the well again and filled his shoe with water. Then he took the dog by the mouth until he had raised himself. He gave the dog some water to drink. He thanked Allah and [his sins were] forgiven." They asked: "O Messenger of God! Is there a reward for us in our animals?" He said: "There is a reward in every living thing" [15].

The Spirituality of Sadaqa: In this section we address the spiritual significance of sadaqa according to the conceptual framework of Islam and the ways in which charity sustains the process of spiritual purification, raises the positive quality of religiosity and enhances the proximity of humans to God. In order to acquire a better understanding of some of these aspects however, one must first explore a number of issues such as sadaqa as a means to piety and devotion to God, secrecy in giving sadaqa, the effects of sadaqa on inner cultivation and on building discipline and lastly the effects of sadaqa on human life in general. The discussion of the spiritual significance of sadaqa cannot be separated from its theological worldview and should be undertaken in accordance with the religious texts of revelation. Also, treatises of Muslim scholars should not be forgotten including the *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* (Revival of religious Sciences) of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111) and *Shajarat al-Ma'arif wa al-Ahwal wa Salih al-Aqwal wal-A'mal* by al-'Izzibn 'Abd al-Salam (d.1261). The religious merits of

sadaqa are numerous. For one, sadaqa is believed to extinguish God's anger, expiate sins, provide immunity from hellfire and provide shade on the Day of Judgment. Moreover, it also fulfills the condition of righteousness (*birr*); leads to the blessed supplication of Angels; causes blessing in wealth; multiplies religious rewards; and further grants Muslims entry to heavens through the *door of sadaqa*. It furthermore stands as a proof of faith (*burhan*); while also purifying wealth from ailments and contaminations including vain speech, misdeeds, wrong oaths or ignorance committed in managing or undertaking business [25]. Prior to this however, let us first focus on certain merits of sadaqa which appear to draw on other Islamic religious concepts and dimensions; these include sadaqa as act of piety, secrecy in giving, the cultivation of the inner being and lastly; optimization of physical and economic conditions.

Sadaqa and Religious Piety: Muslims are commanded to thank God for the gifts and bounties he bestows upon them including wealth, health, knowledge or skills and are further ordered to share with the less fortunate. The religious principle of sharing is broad and open and effectively maintains a vibrant charitable movement that not only enhances the quality of Muslim personal religiosity but results in additional positive yet dynamic changes in the community's respective development. The broad and diverse scope of sadaqa serves to accommodate financial and socio-economic changes affecting the lives of individuals and communities alike. There exist however, a number of Islamic traditions that support the open boundaries of sadaqa, such as the qualification of all sorts of good deeds as sadaqa; which is illustrated in the following: "Every good deed is a sadaqah. To meet your brother with a smiling face and to pour out from your bucket into his container is sadaqah" [26]. This narration illustrates how the daily flow of Muslim behaviour, irrespective of financial commitment, has potential for being transformed into a rewarding charity. The following saying of the Prophet illustrates this concept well: "When you rise in the morning, charity is due from every one of your joints. There is charity in every ascription of glory to Allah; there is charity in every declaration of His Greatness; there is charity in every utterance of praise of Him; there is charity in every declaration that He is the only true God (worthy of worship); there is charity in enjoining good; there is charity in forbidding evil....." [13]. Ibn 'Abd al-Salam

discusses charity by means of words, deeds and wealth and concludes his discussion with the following statement: "Sadaqa is about helping and compassion. There is no difference whatsoever between charity of objects and benefits. The merits of sadaqa are determined according to the merits of given subjects, as well as the purpose established for giving and also with reference to the cause it serves [9].

Charity in Islam is associated with sincere devotion to God and is a means to increased spiritual reward. This is reflected in the following Qur'anic verses: "You will never attain piety until you spend from that which you love. And whatever good you spend, Allah knows it well" (Qur'an 3:92). Prophet Muhammad is also reported to have said: "The people in paradise are three: A person with authority who is just, gives in charity; and a man who is merciful, tender-hearted and feeling for every relative and Muslim; and a person who is content with what Allah provides for him, does not ask others and has many children to support." Giving in charity is thereby viewed as an act of piety yielding manifold rewards [15].

Furthermore, a significant number of Islamic texts place high value on the act of giving while promising great rewards resulting of charity. One of the paramount results is God's pleasure and forgiveness as illustrated in the following verse of the Qur'an: "If ye loan to Allah a beautiful loan, He will double it to your (credit) and He will grant you Forgiveness" (Qur'an, 64: 17). The association of charity with forgiveness likely indicates the possible intimacy between the physical act of giving and the process of spiritual and moral change of the self; as the reward of forgiveness calls attention to the beginning of a fresh intrinsically satisfying cycle of change and personal development. This association qualifies the process of giving with fresh spiritual, emotional and physical inputs while further repositioning the act of charity in a different platform far above and beyond ordinary expectations of material or social rewards.

The religious reward bestowed upon the givers of charity very likely intends to optimize Muslims' interests in donating and to further lighten the hardships encountered throughout the way. It is perhaps through the incentives of spiritual reward that Muslims show continual interest in different kinds of philanthropy and sometime even compete in the fields of charity. Viewing charity as an act of piety and devotion implies that it should be undertaken with the purest possible intentions and made from the best of one's wealth or income, while

further observing the time of need, avoiding procrastination and expecting no thanks other than divine pleasure. Al-'Izzibn 'Abd al-Salam views charity as an act of excellence (*ihsan*) which sits atop the three religious spaces and classifies it into two categories according to which transitive generosity (*ihsanmuta'addi*) is better than intransitive one (*ihsanqasir*). In his opinion, sadaqa belongs to transitive generosity [9].

Purification of the Inner: One of the striking characteristics of sadaqa in Islam is its cleansing of the inner being from ills and maladies; which qualifies it as form of inner worship (*ibadahbatiniyyah*). In fact, the word zakat (compulsory charity) essentially implies elevation and addition with an objective to purify and sanctify both soul and wealth together (Qur'an, 9:103). According to the teaching of Islam, the needy would qualify as a benefactor because his help to the donor resulted in the replacement of the disease of miserliness with generosity. Abu Hamid Ghazali argues that sadaqa is designed to spiritually eliminate the malady of miserliness. However, for the reason that the heart of the giver is not immune to showing-off, pride and insincerity, it has been emphasized that sadaqa should always be given secretly. Certainly, showing-off and miserliness are both very destructive diseases, while sadaqa that is rendered secretly acts as a powerful remedy to them [14]. In Islam, charity brings to balance one's attachment to worldly pleasures and objects.

Sadaqa is not a means of removing or extinguishing the genuine passion for life and the world. It rather seeks to generate a balance in the human conception and approach to natural resources in such a way they together contribute to personal and communal balance and satisfaction, while gradually acquiring growing spiritual and moral capital within the religious worldview of faith. Charity purifies the inner self from negative qualities and habits including egoism, selfishness and self-interest. It is through charity that a Muslim would regain a sense of life balance and humanity; that is to enjoy the sustenance of life while sharing it with others. When used exclusively for personal enjoyment without considering the philanthropic needs of society, wealth loses one of its essential dimensions and instead turn into a negative and occasionally destructive tool resulting in the de-humanizing of humans.

Islam further associates self-sacrifice with success and prosperity. According to the Islamic tradition, charity softens the heart and leads to a state of warmth and soft

heartedness. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have drawn the similitude of a miserly man and the giver of charity as two persons who have two coats of chainmail over them with their hands pressed closely to their breasts and their collarbones. Whenever the giver of charity gives charity, it (the coat of mail) expands so much as to cover his fingers tips and obliterate his footprints. On the other hand, whenever the miserly person intends to give charity the coat of mail contracts and every ring grips the place where it is [27]. The tenderness of the heart finds similar views, such as that of the Hanbalite scholar Ahmad IbnHanbal when he advised a person complaining from having a hard, insensitive and cold heart: "If you wish to soften your heart, then feed the poor (*miskin*) and wipe over the head of an orphan".

Sadaqa is also believed to cause improved states of life such as gaining humility and modesty and the acquisition of better ends of life as reported in the following tradition of the Prophet: "The sadaqa of the Muslim increases during his lifetime. It softens the agony of death and through it, Allah takes away arrogance and vanity." Collectively speaking however, sadaqa enhances the sense of sharing and results in a deep-rooted empowerment; thereby paving the way towards peacemaking and a harmonic, sound social cohesion. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "Acts of kindness protect one from ruin wrought by evil. Sadaqa given secretly appeases the anger of the Lord and a gift to strengthen the ties of relationship increases one's life span. All good deeds are sadaqa and those who do acts of kindness in this world are also the same people in the other world. Those who do misdeeds in this world are the same people in the other world. The first of those who shall enter Paradise are the people who do acts of kindness" [28].

Affecting Physical and Economic Conditions: Prior to discussing the effects of sadaqa on human life, one would need to draw attention to the Muslims' belief that religious devotion in general entails physical strength, wellness and balance in life. As a general rule, the Qur'an and religious supplications are used to treat sickness and abnormalities and along the same paradigm, sadaqa is used as a therapy to cure sick people. The notion of sadaqa's physical effects however is drawn from a specific tradition of the Prophet where he is reported to have said: "Cure your sick people with sadaqa (i.e. charity)" [29]. Charity causes significant spiritual and socio-economic changes. Many Qur'an exegetes agree

with regards to the theological dimensions of Zakat's increase of the state of soul and wealth. This notion alludes to the existence of a finely intimate relationship between Muslim's spiritual endeavours and their physical wellness. 'Abdullah Ibn al-Mubarak, a renowned scholar from Khurasan is reported to have advised a Muslim patient who suffered from a cyst in his knees for years and did not benefit much from many medical treatments with the following: "Go and dig a well in a place where water is needed; I hope a spring would gush and your blood would stop." The patient followed the advice and so he was cured [30].

Sadaqa is also believed to dispel troubles and repel affliction. This essentially implies that charity affects the quality of life and social interaction and engenders increased degrees of peace and tranquility. Needless to say that seen from a social macro perspective, this logic carries tremendously significant effects and deeper implications over society, as sadaqa plays an impactful role and vehicle of social ease and convenience. The individual sadaqa however, is merely the beginning of an expanded theory and process of social transformation. It is though the act of sharing and remembering the needy that one would acquire the extra dimension of approaching and dealing with problems and troubles in general. This may theologially be understood as God's interference and removal of trouble from the path of those who give in charity. It may also mean however, that through giving and sharing, Muslims would reassure a positive approach to the various emerging needs and obstacles; realizing that personal problems are insignificant compared to others'; or perhaps aids the giver in acquiring fresh insight and a healthy outlook to life and its challenges in general.

Sadaqa is viewed as an effective way of increasing wealth. This is understood in light of the belief that wealth is a gift from God and that there are dues in God's wealth. According to Muslim theology, wealth originates with God and is increased by the decree of God and leaves the person by God's will alone. Yet charity does in reality impact the power of wealth. This may be interpreted quantitatively as per the Islamic texts which indicate God's multiplication of wealth as in the verse: "Whoever performs a good act will receive ten times as much" (Qur'an, 6:160) or "The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is that of a grain of corn: it grows seven ears and each ear has a hundred grains. Allah gives manifold increase to whom He pleases; Allah cares for all and knows all things" (Qur'an, 2:261).

The assurance of multiplying charity is provided in the following tradition: "O son of Adam, spend and I shall spend on you." It is clearly stated in the following tradition: "No money ever decreases because of charity" [31] and "Do not hold back; otherwise Allah will withhold from you." Likewise, the promise of multiplication of wealth may be literally interpreted so as to mean a multiplication in the number value. This view nonetheless does not exclude the possibility of multiplication in terms of increase in power of wealth as may be seen with other twin concepts of multiplication affecting one's life, age, time, efforts, energy and so on and so forth.

CONCLUSION

Muslims' ethics of charity are deeply entrenched in their very system of faith, morality and law and are congruent with piety and religious practice. In view of its diversified religious nature, charity in Islam should not be isolated from its theological and moral ground, but rather seen as a mature reflection of Islamic devotion and piety. The understanding of sadaqa's contribution to and effects on building sustainable societies also reflects Islam's stand on the issue. The implications and impact of Islamic concepts on charity however, should further be explored in a multi-religious context and in accordance with a multi-disciplinary approach of scrutiny; with particular attention to the fields of spirituality and peace, as well as social harmony, health and wellness and socio-economic development.

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