

The Spiritual Benefits of Fasting and Charity

Description: Brief explanation of two of the five pillars of Islam, encompassing the reasons behind their high status and the spiritual advantages of participating fully in these acts of worship.

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Objectives:

- To understand the wisdom behind the legislation of *sawm* and *zakah* and some of the spiritual benefits that are attached to them.

Arabic terms:

- *Du'a* - supplication, prayer, asking Allah for something.
- *Hadith* - (plural " *ahadith*) is a piece of information or a story. In Islam it is a narrative record of the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad and his companions.
- *Hadith Qudsi* - Allah's message to humankind transmitted in the words of Prophet Muhammad, usually dealing with spiritual or ethical subjects.
- *Ramadan* - The ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. It is the month in which the obligatory fasting has been prescribed.
- *Sadaqah* - voluntary charity.
- *Salah* - the Arabic word to denote a direct connection between the believer and Allah. More specifically, in Islam it refers to the formal five daily prayers and is the most important form of worship.
- *Sawm* " Fasting
- *Sunnah* - The word *Sunnah* has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.
- *Zakah* - obligatory charity.

Introduction

Fasting and charity are two very important concepts in the religion of Islam. Both are among the five pillars of Islam and both have both voluntary and compulsory forms. The compulsory form of fasting is the fast that Muslims undertake in the month of *Ramadan*. Voluntary fasts can be performed throughout the year (except *Ramadan*). The compulsory form of charity is known as *zakah* and is a fixed portion of a person's wealth paid yearly. Voluntary charity is known as *sadaqah*. Fasting and charity are often combined in *Ramadan* when Muslims try to maximize their rewards. The rules of fasting and charity can be found elsewhere, this lesson is about the spiritual benefits to be gained from these acts.



Fasting (*Sawm*)

**oeOh you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you that you may gain self-restraint.”
(Quran 2:183)**

Fasting is an act of spiritual purification; it is an important act of worship that was legislated in order to bring a person closer to Allah and allow him or her to experience the benefits associated with piety. Throughout the day every time a person conquers his need to eat or drink he remembers Allah. Abstaining from food and drink is only one dimension of fasting.

Abstaining from sinful behaviours is another dimension that is often overlooked. Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, said that some people gain nothing from their *sawm* except hunger and thirst.[\[1\]](#) In another *hadith* he said that if a person does not give up false words and actions, Allah has no need of him giving up food and drink.[\[2\]](#) Fasting purifies the mind and helps a person gain control over his ego and base desires as well as teaches a person how to modify his behaviour and change bad habits into good ones. *Sawm* also teaches compassion and empathy for those who go without food or water on a daily basis. Patience, gratitude and humility are all qualities that Muslims strive to perfect and fasting is one way that help inculcate them in our daily lives.

Fasting is a very special act of worship because it is something that is between the fasting person and God. God says in a *hadith qudsi*, oeFasting is for Me and I alone will reward it”.[\[3\]](#)

The *du'a* of the fasting person will not be refused.[\[4\]](#) Thus making lots of *du'a* when fasting and at the breaking of your fast is highly recommended. At the breaking of fast Allah chooses people to save from the fires of Hell.[\[5\]](#) The end of the fast is also one of the two joyful moments associated with fasting. The other is when a person meets his Lord

and celebrates his successful fasting.[\[6\]](#) Fasting is also a strong fortress that keeps a person safe from the fires of Hell[\[7\]](#) and in addition to this, on the Day of Judgment the fasting itself will intercede for a person.[\[8\]](#)

Charity (*Zakah*)

oeTruly, those who believe, do good deeds, establish *salah* and pay *zakah* will have their reward with their Lord; no fear shall come upon them, nor will they grieve.” (Quran 2:277)

The word *zakah* is mentioned approximately 30 times in the Quran and it is coupled with *salah* for almost all of them. It is a great act of worship that, like fasting, offers the chance for spiritual purification. In the case of *zakah* however it purifies the heart of both the giver and the recipient and it detaches a person from the greed and stinginess often associated with wealth. A person who diligently pays his *zakah* feels closeness to Allah and a responsibility for the poor and needy. To receive *zakah* is also a right given by Allah. The person who receives *zakah* finds his heart purified from the envy and hatred that the poor often have for the rich and powerful. Thus it strengthens the ties of brotherhood.

The word *zakah* literally means that which purifies and it was legislated by Allah for a number of reasons. It redistributes wealth and encourages social justice and responsibility. Islamic Scholar Ibn Taymiyah said that the soul of the person who gives *zakah* is blessed and so too is his wealth. Giving and receiving *zakah* has the spiritual benefit of allowing a person to feel the happiness associated with Allah’s pleasure, forgiveness and blessings. While *zakah* might seem to be a decrease in a person’s wealth or capital it is really a source of blessing and as such leads to an increase in wealth, financially and spiritually.

oeWho is it that would loan Allah a goodly loan so He may multiply it for him many times over?...” (Quran 2:245)

Failure to pay *zakah* is a great sin and as such incurs the wrath of Allah. Prophet Muhammad tells us that on the Day of Judgment a person’s wealth that was not redistributed fairly will wrap itself around his neck in the form of a poisonous snake. It will bite his cheeks saying I am your treasure and wealth.[\[9\]](#) Prophet Muhammad also reminds us that it is *zakah* that will stand between us and calamity.[\[10\]](#)

Endnotes:

[\[1\]](#) Ibn Majah

[\[2\]](#) Saheeh Bukhari

[3] Saheeh Bukhari

[4] Al-Bayhaqi

[5] Imam Ahmad

[6] Saheeh Muslim

[7] Imam Ahmad

[8] Ibid

[9] Saheeh Bukhari

[10] At-Tirmidhi

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