

Sympathy for Others

The month of Ramadhan teaches us how it feels to be poor and hungry. Many Ahadith expound the philosophy of fasting as a blessing from the Almighty so that one becomes aware of the hardships of the poor and the needy. A fasting person acquires the virtues of empathy for others, feels for them when they go through hunger and deprivation as he has also tasted the pain of it through fasting. It is easy for those who have abundant supplies of everything they need, to overlook and underestimate the pains of the less fortunate. The pangs of hunger felt by the fasting person are a reminder.

Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq(a) says:

Allah made fasting incumbent to make equity between the rich and the poor. A rich man does not feel the pains of hunger to have mercy for the poor since he is able to obtain whatever he likes. (By enjoining fasting) Allah wanted to put His creatures on an equal footing by making the rich taste the pain of hunger, so that he may pity and have mercy on the hungry ..

Conditions of the Poor and Needy around the world

Many people around the world live in dire poverty, with very little means to overcome the misery they live in. Young children are forced to live under extremely miserable conditions. They have to struggle daily to get food, many have no homes or shelters, and some have to join the work force to earn for their families. For such children, childhood as a period of carefree days filled with play and laughter is non-existent. Toys, delicious food, new clothes and all the other luxuries taken for granted by many of us, are all unattainable dreams.

Helping Others

It is the duty of those who are fortunate in terms of material wealth, to help the less fortunate in different parts of the world. This can be done by sending aid to various charitable organizations that look after the needs of the poor in countries like India, Iraq and others.

There are many Qur'anic verses that call for spending money in the cause of God:

“The parable of those who spend their wealth in the Way of God is that of a grain of corn. It grows seven ears, and each ear hath a hundred grains. God gives manifold increase to whom He pleases. God cares for all, and He knows all things. For those who spend their wealth in the Cause of God, and follow not up their gifts with reminders or with injury, their reward is with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.” (2:261,262).

God explains that the money we spend in His Cause will be doubled and multiplied for us, and that this will be profitable for us both now and in the Hereafter. The only condition, however, that God sets for the attainment of this reward, is that the benefactor should not remind those who receive his support of his benefaction to them.

The Qur'an urges people to acts of charity and makes it attractive to believers by describing charity as a goodly loan. He says: ***“Who is he that will lend God a goodly loan, which God will double unto his credit and multiply many times? It is God that gives (you) Want or Plenty, and to Him shall be your return”*** (2: 245).

God shows extreme kindness by making charity a sort of goodly loan paid to Him. It is the needy who ask for loans, whereas God, to Whom "belongs the dominion of heavens and the earth, and all in between", is not in need of a loan from His creatures. But the mode of expression is set in this form mainly to attract believers into giving charity, thereby securing a means for the poor to achieve what they need, and for the more fortunate to achieve the pleasure of Allah. The benefit of this loan goes back to human beings themselves, and they enjoy the fruits of it in this world as well as in the Hereafter. Such is the mercy of Allah.

The Qur'an also describes the spending of money in the Cause of God as a profitable trade that benefits its owner on the Day of Resurrection:

“O you who believe! Shall I lead you to commerce that saves you from a grievous Penalty? You should believe in God and His Apostle, and should strive (your utmost) in the cause of God, with your property and your lives. That will be best for you, if you but knew” (61: 1011).

Many Ahadith also talk about the benefit of helping others:

- Charity keeps away from its givers, the heat of the grave, and on the Day of Judgement, the believer will be in the shade of his charity. Holy Prophet (S)
- Allah smiles at the person who stretches out his hand to give charity, and whoever Allah smiles at is forgiven. Holy Prophet (S)
- Guard yourselves from the fire (through charity) even if by a date, for surely Allah will raise it (cause it to grow), just as one of you raises his foal . . . until it becomes greater than a huge mountain. Holy

Prophet (S)

An important point to remember is that the wealth which human beings enjoy actually belongs to Allah. The Qur'an continuously brings men's attention to the fact that wealth is only God's, and that man is no more than a proxy of God in supervising it; consequently, man should not disobey God regarding the trust put under his charge. ***“Allah is the Owner of heavens and the earth: To God belongs the dominion of heavens and the earth”*** (3: 189). ***“And it is God Who provides sustenance to all people: Is there a Creator, other than God, to give you sustenance from heaven or earth?”*** (35: 3).

People are requested to spend of the wealth that God has bestowed upon them, on those who do not have it. The fact is that wealth is not theirs, for they act only as representatives who have been assigned by God to manage it: ***“Spend (in charity) out of the (wealth) whereof He hath made you heirs”*** (57: 7). ***“And spend something (in charity) out of the wealth which We have bestowed on you, before Death should come to any of you and he should say, ‘O my Lord! Why did You not give me respite for a little while? I should then have given (largely) in charity, and I should have been one of the righteous”*** (63: 10).

Being Grateful to the Almighty

Just as fasting teaches us to sympathize with the poor and the needy, it also teaches us to be grateful for all the blessings of the Almighty we enjoy. The food and wholesome drinks so abundantly available are great blessings of God. Because we have them everyday, we do not realize their importance. But when we are forced to restrain ourselves while fasting, we understand the importance of having enough to eat and satisfy the pangs of hunger.

The Holy Qur'an says:

“And whoever is grateful, he is grateful for his own soul, and whoever is ungrateful, then surely My Lord is Self-sufficient, Honored.” (27:40)

“Nay! But serve Allah alone, and be among the thankful ones.” (39:66)

The following Ahadith also talk about the importance of being grateful:

- The first of your obligations to Allah is to thank His favors, and seek His pleasure.

Imam Ali (a)

- Every breath you take requires thanks, in fact a thousand thanks, and more.

Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq (a)

- No-one knows a favor except the one who thanks, and no-one thanks a favor except the one who

knows.

Imam Hasan al-Askari (a)

Exercises

1. Choose a country that has recently undergone a tragedy (war, earthquake, hurricane etc.). What happened to the people there? Imagine you were living there. Write a short essay on how you would feel if you had to go through the misery there.
2. Read the following paragraph from the book Risalatul Huqooq by Imam Zaynul Abidin (a): The right of charity is that you know that it is a storing way with your Lord, and a deposit for which you will have no need of witnesses. If you deposit it in secret, you will be more confident of it than if you deposit it in public. You should know that it repels affliction and illnesses from you in this world and it will repel the fire from you in the next world. Explain this in your own words. According to this paragraph, what is the best way of giving charity? What three benefits of charity does Imam mention? Now write down the points Imam makes in this paragraph.
3. Read the translation of Dua no. 44 from Saheefa as-Sajjadiyyah. What does Imam say about charity in the month of Ramadhan.

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