**Sadaqa (Voluntary Alms)**



Those men and women who give alms (by spending out of their wealth in both the prescribed and supererogatory duties of alms-giving), and lend to God a goodly loan (by spending either in His cause or for the needy), it will be increased manifold to their credit; and they will have an honorable, generous reward in addition.9 [[1]](#endnote-2)

9. Verse 16 is a warning against the hardening of hearts toward the Divine teachings and God's Remembrance, and a reminder of the importance of striving in God's cause. One of the most important reasons of this hardening is growing familiarity with the Revelation and the revealed Divine teachings, and the passage of time after it. Another important reason is committing sins (transgression) through indifference to God's warnings. So it is necessary to continuously be alert against such a hardening, and always to seek means for the softening of the heart. As pointed out in verses 17 and 18, just as God revives any land after its death with rain, and this is repeated every year, He may also revive dead or dead-like hearts with clear Revelations, provided we remain loyal to God and His Religion by carrying out God's commands and avoiding transgression, and by spending in His cause.



O you who believe! Render not vain your almsgiving by putting (the receiver) under an obligation and taunting – like him who spends his wealth to show off to people and be praised by them, and believes not in God and the Last Day. The parable of his spending is that of a rock on which there is soil; a heavy rain falls upon it, and leaves it barren. They have no power (control) over what they have earned. God guides not such disbelieving people (to attain their goals).[[2]](#endnote-3)

Abu Dharr, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “*Sadaqa* is owed by every joint you have. Every glorification is *sadaqa*. Every praise is *sadaqa*. Every *La ilahailla’llah* is *sadaqa*. Every *takbir* is *sadaqa*. Commanding the right is *sadaqa*. Forbidding the wrong is *sadaqa*. Praying two units in the forenoon (Duha) covers all these.”[[3]](#endnote-4)

Abu Hurayra, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “A man said, ‘I must give some *sadaqa*,’ and went out with his *sadaqa*, putting it in the hand of a thief. The next day people said he had given *sadaqa* to a thief. He said, ‘O Allah, praise is Yours. I will again give *sadaqa*.’ He went out with his *sadaqa* and this time put it in the hand of an adulteress. The next day people said that he had given *sadaqa* in the night to an adulteress. He said, ‘O Allah, praise is Yours. I gave it to an adulteress. I will give more *sadaqa*.’ He went out with his *sadaqa* and put it in the hand of a rich man. The next day people said he had given *sadaqa* to a rich man. He said, ‘O Allah, praise is Yours. I have given *sadaqa* to a thief, an adulteress, and a rich man.’ Then someone said to him, ‘Your*sadaqa* to a thief might make him abstain from stealing. What you gave to the adulteress might make her abstain from her fornication. And what you gave to the rich man might make him reflect so that he will spend out from what Allah has given him.’” [[4]](#endnote-5)

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What is sadaqah?

Encompassing a greater area than that of the obligatory alms of *Zakâh*, *sadaqah* can be money, goods, education, or anything given for the sake of God to the poor as a form of voluntary charity. There are many benefits of giving *sadaqah* both in this world and the hereafter. *Sadaqah* is the expiation of sin, a shield against the flames of the Hellfire, and it also wards off affliction and disaster. In the following hadith, God’s Messenger has drawn attention to the broad extent of *sadaqah* and underlined its importance, even if it be a tiny portion, in making amends for a person’s wrongs, along with providing a shield against the torment of punishment: “Protect yourselves from hellfire, even if it be with half a date.”

If Muslims are asked for help of any kind, they should never reject the request and should always try to help to the best of their ability. Any *sadaqah* given in secret bears greater reward, as the Prophet said in one of the hadith: “Three things are accounted among the treasures of righteousness, and one of them is giving charity in secret.”

# WHAT IS SADAQA (THE VOLUNTARY ALMS)?

The term *sadaqa* carries the literal meanings of truth, acceptance and concurance.[12](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5COak%5CDesktop%5CCharity_in_Islam.docx#_bookmark352) Yet in the Qur’an and hadith, the word harbors meanings of greater depth as a source of extreme kindness and benevolence, along with the occasional intimation of charity toward others, or simply refraining from harmful conduct. When Yusuf’s brothers implore him by saying, *“Be charitable to us*,”[13](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5COak%5CDesktop%5CCharity_in_Islam.docx#_bookmark353) the word they use in place of “charity” is an etymological derivative of *sadaqa*. Conversely, while designating the eight groups of *zakat* recipients[14](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5COak%5CDesktop%5CCharity_in_Islam.docx#_bookmark354), the word used is also an etymological derivative of *sadaqa* and alludes to *zakat*.

The profound depth of *sadaqa*’s meaning can also be verified through the fact that the word has often been used instead of *zakat* in many hadiths that elaborate the amount of *nisab* (e.i. the minimum for *zakat* becoming payable); moreover the term has been utilized to cover other meanings such as performing virtuous acts, lending a helping hand, enjoining good and prohibiting evil. The following hadith may afford us a clearer understanding of the copious meanings sheltered under one word:

When the Messenger of God (upon him be peace and blessings) told the Companions there is *sadaqa* on every Muslim, the Companions hastily asked “O the Messenger of God! What if the Muslim couldn’t afford it?” The Noble Messenger gave a counter reply “Then with his own efforts he will work, hence he will benefit himself and be charitable (*sadaqa*) to others.” “What if he still couldn’t afford it?” again inquired the Companions. “Then he will help those in need,” explained the Messenger. “What if he still could not possess this opportunity?” insisted the Companions. “Then he will perform good acts, protect himself from committing evil; this will also be *sadaqa* for him.”[15](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5COak%5CDesktop%5CCharity_in_Islam.docx#_bookmark355)

The advice given by the Messenger of God to one of his Companions, Abu Dharr, is along the same lines. To receive the recommendation, Abu Dharr once asked, “O Messenger of God! What should I do, if one day, frailty and powerlessness would befall me?” The Prophet replied, “Then hold back from harming others, as indubitably, that will be a *sadaqa* for yourself.”[16](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5COak%5CDesktop%5CCharity_in_Islam.docx#_bookmark356)

It is amply evident, the word *sadaqa*, as utilized in the Qur’an and hadith, accommodates an extensive cluster of meanings that virtually encompass a large aspect of life itself. As an Islamic concept, however, *sadaqa* is the name given to any offer, deed or presentation where the spiritual payment is expected only from God.[17](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5COak%5CDesktop%5CCharity_in_Islam.docx#_bookmark357) In the present day, this is the implicit understanding derived from *sadaqa*. Ultimately, if an analogous comparison were to be undertaken, the outcome would be that “Every *zakat* is *sadaqa*, although not every *sadaqa* is *zakat*.” (5)

# THE SADAQA AL-FITR

Literally, *fitr* means breaking the fast or creation. The *sadaqa al-fitr*, however, is a financial obligation for Muslims who at the time of the Festivity of Ramadan, possess more than the prescribed amount of provisions for themselves and their dependents after giving the *sadaqa al-fitr.*

*Sadaqa al-fitr* is *wajib* (necessary) according to the Hanafi School, and *fard* (obligatory) according to other Islamic Schools of Jurisprudence. It is also called the “head *zakat*,” owing to the fact that it’s a financial responsibility for each person. As for its compulsoriness, technically, it is a display of gratitude upon the first day of the Festivity of Ramadan.

In many hadith, the Prophet of God has commanded the offering of *sadaqa al-fitr*. Ibn Umar, one of the Companions, conveyed the following: “The Messenger of God has decreed *sadaqa al-fitr* compulsory on slaves, men, women, children and adults as a measure of dates and of barley to be given before the eid prayer (the prayer marking the end of Ramadan).”[2](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5COak%5CDesktop%5CCharity_in_Islam.docx#_bookmark547) Another narration in relation is that of Abu Said al-Hudri’s: “We had given *sadaqa al-fitr* at the time of the Prophet, from our provisions, which were, at the time, barley, raisins, dates and cheese.”[3](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5COak%5CDesktop%5CCharity_in_Islam.docx#_bookmark548) I n another hadith, the following declaration can be cited, “Pay the *sadaqa al-fitr* on behalf of those under your guardianship.”[4](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5COak%5CDesktop%5CCharity_in_Islam.docx#_bookmark549)

The *sadaqa al-fitr*, as an established deed in Islam, is offered in gratitude for the blessings of life and the existence bestowed by the Creator on a person and on those under his or her care. Indeed, the compulsoriness of *sadaqa al-fitr* is not entailed by fasting; rather, it is compulsory for everyone, regardless of whether they fast or not.

As alluded to by the hadith, *sadaqa al-fitr* mends those ignoble actions, which are undesirable for all of us and quite unacceptable for those who fast, thus virtually completing the month of physical sacrifice while giving the poor grounds and means by which to join in the celebrations of Ramadan Eid.[5](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5COak%5CDesktop%5CCharity_in_Islam.docx#_bookmark550) It has also been added that the offering of *sadaqa al-fitr* consolidates the acceptance of fasting, acquires salvation, and grants liberation from the anguish of death and the tribulations of the grave.

##### **DOES SADAQA AL-FITR ENCOMPASS A GREATER AREA THAN THAT OF ZAKAT?**

*Sadaqa al-fitr*, performed by obligation, encompasses a greater area than that of *zakat* and providentially is a means whereby everybody enjoys the opportunity to taste the heavenly flavor of spending in the way of God. In other words, it allows everyone a way of seeing and comprehending, first hand, the situation of the poor, as well as providing a chance for those with means to learn how to assist the poor without compromising their dignity. Consequently, a robust and permanent bridge of friendship is built between members of society.

# WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE OBLIGATION OF SADAQA AL-FITR?

Here are the conditions for obligation:

##### **BEING A MUSLIM**

To be under the obligation of *sadaqa al-fitr*, one needs to be a Muslim. According to the Shafii School, however, a non-Muslim also needs to pay *sadaqa al-fitr* for those Muslims of kindred living under his care.

##### **POSSESSING WEALTH EQUIVALENT TO (AT LEAST) NISAB**

As it is in *zakat*, to become eligible for *sadaqa al-fitr*, one needs to possess, apart from the basic necessities, wealth equivalent to *nisab*, an amount equal to 85 grams of gold or 595 grams of silver. Unlike *zakat*, the possessed wealth does not need to be of increasing nature and a full year does not need to elapse. The Shafii, Hanbali and Maliki Schools contend that *nisab* is not a  pre-requisite for *sadaqa al-fitr*; in fact, every Muslim possessing the basic necessities as well as the sustenance to see him through the night of *Eid* is compelled to perform *sadaqa al-fitr*. A person having become obliged with *sadaqa al-fitr* does not become free of this obligation upon losing his wealth or having it drop below *nisab*. However, if one dies owing *sadaqa al-fitr*, this debt need not to be extracted out of his will, though it is better for the beneficiaries to offer it voluntarily.

##### **AHLIYAH (THE RIGHT TO DISPOSE ON PROPERTY OR WEALTH)**

*Sadaqa al-fitr* does not necessitate one to be an *aqil baligh* (i.e. sane adult). Leading Hanafi jurists, Abu Hanifa and Abu Yusuf, main tain that the *sadaqa al-fitr* needs to be given even from the wealth owned by a juvenile or a person who is mentally ill; moreover, a father must give *sadaqa al-fitr* from the possessions of his wealthy child.

##### **GUARDIANSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY OF SUPERVISION**

For one to be compelled with the fulfillment of *sadaqa al-fitr* on behalf of others, these others must be under guardianship as people whom one is obliged to take care of. A Muslim, wealthy enough to be eligible for *sadaqa al-fitr* must also offer it for the children and the mentally ill who lack financial resources and are living in his custody, or under his care. Additionally, grandchildren whose father has passed away must also be paid *sadaqa al-fitr* for. In conjunction, however, one is not required to pay *sadaqa al-fitr* for parents, children who have become adults, the wife, brothers and sisters even if they are living under one’s care, owing to the fact that they are not technically under his guardianship. Anyhow, one is more than welcome to voluntarily offer fitr for them. However, the majority of scholars, except for the Hanafi, advise that one is required to offer *sadaqa al-fitr* for his Muslim parents and wife living under his care, if in possession of the minimum wealth.

##### **TIME**

The performance of *sadaqa al-fitr* becomes necessary, according to the Hanafi School, on the first day of Ramadan Eid, with the break of dawn, as *sadaqa al-fitr* is a charity attached with this specific moment in time. Accordingly, if one dies or becomes poor before the dawn of the first day of the Eid, he is no longer compelled with its performance, although offering it is necessary for those who are born or have become Muslim before the dawn of the day. *Sadaqa al-fitr* is not necessary for a baby born after dawn, or for one who has embraced Islam after dawn for that matter. Other Islamic jurisprudential schools hold the view that *sadaqa al-fitr* becomes necessary with the sunset of the final day of Ramadan.

**WHEN IS SADAQA AL-FITR GIVEN?**

*Sadaqa al-fitr* can be given as soon as Ramadan commences. Scholars, in addition, have recommended its payment at least a couple of days prior to Eid, in accordance with its aim of assisting the poor in acquiring their needs. Delaying its payment until after the first day of Eid is inappropriate. Nonetheless, given that it has been delayed, the obligation continues and thus it must be fulfilled immediately. According to the Shafii School, it is forbidden to delay the payment of fitr, without excuse, until after the first day of Eid.

# HOW SHOULD SADAQA AL-FITR BE PAID?

Sadaqa *al-fitr* is an act of worship, and thus it necessitates the pronouncement of the intention to be uttered upon payment or beforehand, during the allocation of the amount.

Through intention*,* the heart intends that the *sadaqa al-fitr* is for the sake of God, and though the essence of this intention lays in the heart, it can also be uttered in confirmation. The benefactor should be in a state of mind wherein he recognizes that he is returning to its proper owners the wealth entrusted with him by the Creator—rather than seeing himself or herself as a “generous” person. Thus, there is no need to publicize by saying, “This is *sadaqa al-fitr*,” during payment, and there is an important requirement to avoid issuing reminders of one’s generosity: *“Cancel not your charity by reminders of your generosity or by injury”* (Baqara 2:264).

In terms of assisting the poor in taking care of their necessities, it is better to offer *sadaqa al-fitr* in cash, although according to need, it may well be paid in the form of the other items. *Sadaqa al-fitr* must be handed over to the poor as bestowed property; critically, therefore, it is not valid for someone to pay *sadaqa al-fitr* in expectation of a repayment.

# WHO ARE THE RECIPIENTS OF SADAQA AL-FITR?

The locations for disbursing both *sadaqa al-fitr* and *zakat* are the same. Therefore,  those ineligible for *zakat* are also ineligible to receive *sadaqa al-fitr*. Those who are not entitled to accept *sadaqa al-fitr* are as follows: people deemed rich by Islam, in other words, those in possession of wealth equivalent to *nisab*, irrespective of it being augmentable or not, the wife of the benefactor, parents and grandparents alike, as well as children, grandchildren and others whom the benefactor is obliged to look after. The benefactor should give priority to the poor within close vicinity, relatives even if they are far, and students. Instead of giving *sadaqa al-fitr* only to one person, the benefactor may choose to distribute it among a few people—although bearing in mind that *sadaqa al-fitr* should ultimately take care of a person’s daily sustenance, it is perhaps wiser, or more easily accomplished, to present it to one person. Moreover, *sadaqa al-fitr* collected from a few donors can be given to one single recipient.(6)

**References**

1. **57:18/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal** [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. **2:264/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**  [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. **Sahih Muslim, Salatu’l-Musafirin, 84, Zakah, 56** [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. **Sahih al-Bukhari, Zakah, 14; Sahih Muslim, Zakah, 78**

(5)Senturk, Omer Faruk. “Charity in Islam” Tughra Books Press. January 2007.

**(6) THE YOUNG PERSON’S GUIDE TO LIVING ISLAM by ASLI KAPLAN, TUGHRABOOKS** [↑](#endnote-ref-5)