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Foreword

The Islamic Education department of The World Federation is to be commended for publishing yet another booklet in the series of forty traditions, this time on the topic of Zakat. It is particularly pleasing to note that the compiler has included at least five traditions on the ratio legist of this prominent Islamic injunction, traditions which consistently re–iterate one of the significant purposes of this practice to be the alleviation of poverty.

This rationale is entirely in accord with Qur'an 9:60, a verse which enumerates the different recipients of Zakat, the first two being the 'fuqara' (poor) and the 'masakin' (destitute). More importantly however, being creatures blessed with intellects, humans are naturally inquisitive creatures, forever questioning, and being satisfied only when an intellectually convincing response is given. Thus these five traditions serve to respond and satisfy such questions especially with respect to the legislation of Zakat.

At times there can appear to be a degree of angst and misconception within the Twelver Shi'a Muslim community regarding the payment of Zakat. This is because the Ja'fari Shi'a law seems to have explicitly limited the items, 2 which qualify for the Zakat levy. 3 Thus, in the modern era where some economies may have diversified away from being dependent on agrarian, livestock based or mineral based economies, the applicability of Zakat may seem suddenly redundant! 4

This apprehension is understandable in light of the great emphasis on Zakat both in the Qur'an and in the Sunnah 5 as well as it's coupling with Salat, the daily ritual prayer, and with the notion of piety. 6 The arising debates and questions are to be welcomed wholeheartedly as they result in sorely needed clarifications from the scholars and an opportunity to educate the masses. But perhaps this apprehension with regards to Zakat is misplaced due to the following reasons.

The concept of Zakat in the Qur'an and the Sunnah is considerably more expansive than the limited strictures of the law and may be understood at several levels. Arabic dictionaries offer two basic meanings for the tri–literal verb 'z k y' from which the noun 'Zakat' is derived. The first meaning is 'to thrive, to grow and to increase'. This meaning is confirmed and aptly reflected in four traditions within this very same publication. The other meaning offered is 'to become pure, to be just and righteous'. This meaning may be applied to material items as in Qur'an 9:103 where the word 'tazakki' is used

synonymously with 'tutahhir' (to purify) 10 and it can also be applied to the human self as in Qur'an 87:14, 3:163, 62:2 and 35:18. Thus some of the general verses exhorting to 'Zakat' may actually be considered to be an exhortation to self–purification and not a fi These are traditions, numbers: 5,6,7,8 and 21. These items are nine in number and they are: (*Coins*): silver and gold, (*Cattle*): camels, cows, sheep and goats; (*Crops*): wheat, barley, dates and raisins. For further details, refer to Ayatullah Sistani, *Islamic Laws*, United Kingdom, 1994, pg. 336. nancial levy.

Thereafter, the term 'Zakat' has been used in the Qur'an to mean both obligatory Zakat and general, recommended Zakat in the sense of charity (Sadaqah). Some relevant examples would be Qur'an 5:55, 19:31, 19:55 and 21:73. Thus Shi'a Muslims may decide to give out any amount from their wealth as charity, a practice that is highly recommended in Imami teachings and therefore they would be rightly considered as properly applying the Qur'anic teachings on Zakat.

Furthermore, Imami law has always considered it to be recommended to pay Zakat on business goods at 2.5%11 as well as on items which can be weighed or things that grow from the earth, over and above the nine determined items. 12 Thus the scope of Zakat seems to be wider than previously envisaged. Finally, this publication itself contains at least fifteen Imami traditions which bring to light yet another aspect of Zakat; that of the various bodily organs as well as the various abstract human endowments such as beauty, knowledge and bravery. These traditions inform that the correct use of these organs and endowments is tantamount to paying Zakat in respect to them. 13 Therefore, some of the Qur'anic verses calling to the practice of Zakat may also be understood in this light.

The institution of Zakat as taught and encouraged in the Qur'an is therefore vibrantly alive both in the realm of Imami law and ethics. It remains for the community to become versed as to the expansive scope of the term 'zakat' as well as the legal evidences underlying the limited scope of items liable for the Zakat levy in Imami law.

Finally, it is to be hoped that the Islamic Education team will continue to bring forth more of this genre of literature, in response to the Prophetic tradition14 which is clearly its inspiration.

Afzal Sumar · London · 9/9/09

- 1. These are traditions, numbers: 5,6,7,8 and 21.
- 2. These items are nine in number and they are: (Coins): silver and gold, (Cattle): camels, cows, sheep and goats; (Crops): wheat, barley, dates and raisins. For further details, refer to Ayatullah Sistani, Islamic Laws, United Kingdom, 1994, pg. 336.
- 3. See the tradition of Muhammad al-Tayyar in al-Hurr al-Amili, Wasail al Shi'a vol. 6, pg. 36, cited in S.M. Rizvi, Zakat in Shi'a Fiqh, pg 2, available from: http://www.al-mubin.org/attachments/233Zakat%20revised.pdf [1] as well as from: http://www.dartabligh.org/ [2], and the authentic tradition of Fudhala from both Imams al-Baqir and al-Sadiq (as) in Wasail al-Shi'a vol. 6, pg 34, cited in Baqir al-Irawani, Tafsir Ayat al-ahkam min al-Qur'an, Beirut, 2004, vol. 1, pg 175.
- 4. Imami Shi'a legal specifications of Zakat would of course still perfectly apply to those economies that are agrarian, livestock or mineral based.
- 5. For examples, see traditions, numbers: 1,2,18 and 19 in this publication.
- 6. For an example, see traditions numbers: 3 and 4 in this publication.
- 7. E.W.Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, Beirut, 1968, vol.3, pg 406 and J.M.Cowan, The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, New York, 1976, pg 379.
- 8. See traditions, numbers: 9,10,11 and 12 in this publication.

- 9. E.W.Lane, An Arabic–English Lexicon, Beirut, 1968, vol.3, pg 406 and J.M.Cowan, The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, New York, 1976, pg 379. The 2nd and 5th forms of this verb specifically mean 'to purify'. See also traditions, numbers: 9 and 38 in this publication where the 2nd from is used and translated as 'purification'. For examples of the 5th form used with the same connotation, see Qur'an 20:76, 35:18, 79:18.
- 10. For more examples, refer to Qur'an 92: 18, where the 5th form is used in reference to purifying wealth and Qur'an 18:19, where the 1st form superlative is used in reference to food.
- 11. See Ayatullah Sistani, Islamic Laws, United Kingdom, 1994, pg 350 and also pg 336 where Syed Sistani has ruled Zakat to be an obligatory precaution on business wealth. See also tradition number 22 in this publication.
- 12. See footnote 3 on page 2 in S.M. Rizvi, Zakat in Shi'a Fiqh.
- 13. See traditions, numbers: 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 and 37 in this publication.
- 14. Refer to page 5 for this Prophetic tradition.

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