

THE WORDS: ZAKAH AND SADAQAH

The Meaning of the Word *Zakah* in Language and in *Shari'ah*

Zakah in language is an infinitive of the verb *zakah*. *Zakah* means to grow and to increase. When it is said about a person, it means to improve, to become better. Consequently *zakah* is blessing, growth, cleanliness, and betterment.¹ In *Lisan al Arab* it is said, "The root of the word *zakah* in Arabic means cleanliness, growth, blessing, and praise. All these meanings of the word are used in Qur'an and *Hadith*." It seems to be most obvious according to al Wahidi and others that the root "*zakah*" means increase and growth. For example, with respect to plants it means to grow and with respect to things, it means to increase. But since plants grow only if they are clean of insects and other detrimental things, then the word "*zakah*" implies cleanliness and cleansing. If it is used with respect to persons, *zakah* then means betterment and righteousness. You may say a man is "*zaki*"; that is, he has good character, or you may say that the judge "*zakah*" the witnesses to mean he shows that they are of a higher level in their testimony.

In *Shari'ah* the word *zakah* refers to the determined share of wealth prescribed by God to be distributed among deserving categories. It is also used to mean the action of payment of this share². According to al Nawawi's report from al Wahidi, this share of wealth is called *zakah* because it increases the funds from which it is taken and protects them from being lost or destroyed.³ Ibn Taimiyah said that the inner soul of the *zakah* payer becomes better, and his wealth becomes cleansed.⁴ Growth and cleanliness are not restricted to the *zakated* assets themselves, but reach out to the person who pays *zakah*, in accordance to the verse "out of their wealth take *zakah* that so thou mightest purify and sanctify them".⁵ Al Azhari says: it makes the poor grow too, meaning that *zakah* creates psychological and material growth for the rich in his soul and wealth.

Al Nawawi reports that the author of *al Hawi* said: "It should be realized that *zakah* is an Arabic word known before Islam. It is well known that it has been used in poetry". On the other hand, Dawud al Zahiri said this word has no source in the Arabic language before it was used in Qur'an. The author of al Hawi answered "although this is totally wrong, differences about the name do not affect the rulings on *zakah*."

Knowing this, one can find no base for the claims of the Jewish Orientalist, Shacht, who wrote in the Encyclopedia of Islam under the title of *Zakah* that the Prophet (p) used the word *zakah* to mean more than what it meant for the Arabs and borrowed some

of the meaning of the word from Jews that used the Hebrew and Aramaic word *Zakut*." Schacht said: "The Prophet (p), when he was in Makkah, used the word *zakah* and its derivatives to mean cleansing. This meaning has a close tie to the word *zakah* in Arabic and in the mind of Arabs but this word and its derivatives are not used except for that meaning in the Qur'an and this is not an original Arabic meaning: it is borrowed from Judaism where it means 'fear of God'.⁷ Orientalists such as Schacht have a fanatic desire to attribute as much as they can of the Islamic concepts, words, rulings, thoughts, and ethical values to Jewish or Christian origins or at least to any other origin, be it Eastern or Western, following only the whims of their own bias. It is sufficient however, to disprove his claim by stating the following two points:

Firstly, Qur'an used the word *zakah*, in the meaning known to Muslims now, as early as the beginning of the Makkan period. This is found in Suras: 7:156, 19:31 and 55, 21:72, 23:4, 27:3, 30:39, 31:3 and 41:7. It is undoubtedly known that the Prophet (p) did not know Hebrew or any other language except Arabic, and that he had no contact with Jews before migrating to Madinah. When and how could he borrow from Jews and Judaism?

Secondly, it is mere speculation that violates scientific methodology for anyone to claim that a language had borrowed a word from another language simply because he finds the word common to the two languages. Such a common word does not necessarily mean that one language borrowed it from the other. It is even more speculative to point out one language as borrowing and the other as borrowed from without any proof.

The Meaning of *Sadaqah*

Zakah as known in Shari'ah is sometimes called in the Qur'an and Sunnah "*sadaqah*", to the extent that al Mawardi said "*Sadaqah* is *zakah*, and *zakah* is *sadaqah*. They are two names for the same thing."⁸ God (J) says, "of their wealth take *sadaqah* that so thou mightest purify and sanctify them"⁹ and "and among them are men who slander thee in the matter of *sadaqat*"¹⁰ and "*sadaqat* are for the poor and the needy."^{11,12} *Hadith* says, "There is no *sadaqah* in what is less than five *Wasq*. There is no *sadaqah* in what is less than five camels and there is no *sadaqah* in what is less than five uqiyah."¹³ Addressing Mu'adh when sent to Yemen the Prophet (p) said "Inform them that God has prescribed *sadaqah* on their funds, to be taken from their rich." All these texts were talking about *zakah* while using the word *sadaqah*, even the *zakah* collector and distributor is called *musaddiq*. But in the later history of Islam, *sadaqah* was traditionally used to mean only Voluntary charitable donations given to beggars and destitutes. But such a tradition must not be allowed to mislead us and divert us from the meaning of the word at the time when Qur'an was being revealed. The root of the word *sadaqah* is the word *sidq*. Judge Abu Bakr bin al 'Arabi, commenting on naming *zakah sadaqah*, states that "It is derived from *sidq*. *Sidq* is truthfulness in realizing declared belief by action. The root *sidq* means realizing and supporting something by another. The word *sadaq* (Dowry) for women means realizing the lawfulness of intimacy by the contract and the dowry under specific conditions known in *Shari'ah*."

The root *sidq* has several derivatives. The verb *saddaqa* with respect to statements means to accept and to realize. The verb *tasaddaqa* with respect to funds means gave away, realizing his faith by action. And the verb *asdaqa* means to give dowry in marriage to women. The meaning of *sadaqah* is derived from the root *sidq* because *sadaqah* implies giving away goods and funds for the sake of God in expression of faithfulness and in realization of the belief in resurrection and afterlife."¹⁴ It is for that reason that Qur'an associated giving with affirmation of faith and withholding with rejection of faith, God (s) says, "So he who gives in charity and fears God and in all sincerity testifies to the best, we will indeed make smooth for him the path to bliss, but he who is a greedy miser and thinks himself self-sufficient and gives lies to the best we will indeed make smooth for him the path to misery."¹⁵

Sadaqah is thus an indication of truthfulness in faith and sincere belief in the day of judgment. Accordingly, the Messenger of God (p) said *sadaqah* is a proof (or evidence),"¹⁶

Zakah in the Holy Qur'an

The word *al zakah* occurs in the Qur'an thirty times.¹⁷ In twenty-seven of them it is associated with prayers in the same verse. In one place it is mentioned with prayers in the same sequence of verses, this is, "those who humble themselves in their prayers" and "who are active indeed in *zakah*."¹⁸ Surveying these thirty places in the Qur'an shows that eight of them are Makkan verses and the others are Madinan.¹⁹ Some writers claim that *zakah* is associated with prayers in eighty-two places in the Qur'an²⁰, but this is an obvious exaggeration. Since even if we include such places that have implicit reference to *zakah*, while words like spending, lending or feeding are mentioned, we would not reach that acclaimed number. As for the word *sadaqah*, and its plural, *sadaqat*, it is mentioned in the Qur'an twelve times, all of them in Madinan suras.

Footnotes

1. *Al Mu'jam al Wasit*, Vol.. 1 p. 398.
2. At Zamakhshari said in his *al Fa'iq* Vol.. 1, p. 536, first printing "*zakah* is like the word *sadaqah*. It is a common name" used to refer to a material thing which is the part of the fund paid out in the form of zakah. It also refers to an abstract meaning, the action of sanctification. It was because of lack of knowledge of this latter meaning of the word that some people did not understand the verse, "and those who are active in practicing zakah" thinking of it as a reference to money paid out while it is a reference to the action of sanctification and purification.
3. *Al Majmu'*, Vol.. 5, p. 324.
4. The collection of *Fatawa Shiekh al Islam Ibn Taimiyah*, Vol. 25, p. 8.
5. *Sura at Tawbah*, 9:103.

6. *Al Majmu'*, Vol. 5 p. 325.
7. *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol.. 10, pp. 355-6.
8. At Mawardi, *al Ahkam al Sultaniyah*, the beginning of Chapter 11.
9. *Sura at Tawbah*, 9:103.
10. *Sura at Tawbah*, 9:58.
11. *Sura at Tawbah*, 9:60.
12. The late professor Dr. Muhammad Yusuf Musa, commented on, Schact "Qur'an refers first to the meaning of *zakah* using the word *sadaqah*, then used the word *zakah*. But if we look carefully in the Makkan suras of the Qur'an we find the word *zakah* used long before the words *sadaqah* and *sadaqat*. The letters are only used in Madinan suras."
13. Reported by Bukhari, Muslim, and others.
14. *Ahkam al Qur'an* part 2, p. 946, with commentary by al Bijawi.
15. *Sura al Layl*, 92:5-10.
16. Reported by Muslim.
17. We used the word *al zakah*, with the article *al* (the) to refer to the word used in the religious meaning. The word *zakah*, in the pure meaning, is mentioned in two additional places: in sura 18:81, and in sura 19:13.
18. *Sura at Muminun*, 23:2 and 4.
19. See the *Index of the Words of the Holy Qur'an* by Muhammad Fu'ad 'Abd al Baqi, under "*Zakah*".
20. See *al Dur al Mukhtar*, *al Bahr*, *al Nahr*, and other books of the Hanifites, Ibn Abideen quoted a correction in his commentary, *Rad al Muhtar*. But the fact is that it came associated with prayer in only 28 places.