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Table of Contents

Zakir Naik's Techniques in Comparative Theological Discourse: Some Reflections	5-23
<i>Mohammad Aminul Islam</i> <i>Thameem Ushama</i>	
Hamka's <i>Da'wah</i> Reform: Islamisation of Self, Education, and Institution	25-46
<i>Haslina Ibrahim</i>	
A Recollection of a Positive Qur'ānic Character: Maryam Bint 'Imrān	47-68
<i>Che Amnah Bahari</i>	
The Practice of Giving in Islam and Buddhism: Its Impact on man's spiritual well-being	69-87
<i>Masitoh Ahmad</i>	
Kenneth Cragg's Assertion on the Notion of Incarnation in the Qur'ān: A Critical Appraisal	89-105
<i>Akilu Aliyu Muhammad</i> <i>Noor Amali Mohd Daud</i>	
Exploring Emotional and Spiritual Intelligence of Prophet Muḥammad SAW	107-125
<i>Fatimah Abdullah</i>	
Feasibility of the Goal of Sociology under Its Current Methodology	127-148
<i>Hayatullah Laluddin</i> <i>Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak</i>	
الأسباب المؤدية إلى وجود مشاعر سلبية تجاه الإله عند المراهقين المسلمين ومظاهرها والحلول المقترحة له	
Driving Factors for Having the Feeling of Resentment towards God among Muslim Adolescents: Its Phenomena and Solutions	149-174
<i>Abdelrahman Mohamed Nada</i> <i>Masitoh Ahmad</i>	

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The Practice of Giving in Islam and Buddhism: Its Impact on Man's Spiritual Well-being.

Masitoh Ahmad*

Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the significance of almsgiving practice and its impact on man's spiritual well-being in the teaching of Islam and Buddhism. It also aims at highlighting the commonalities shared by the two religions in the practice of Giving. It discusses the concept, the purpose, the classification, and the distribution of almsgiving in Islam and Buddhism. The discussion also touches on how almsgiving practices in both religions contribute to the well-being of man's spiritual life. The study uses qualitative methods in which library research, analytical and comparative methods are applied. The finding shows that both Islam and Buddhism have common ground on the practice of giving, in which both *Ṣadaqah* and *Dāna* are mainly practiced to cleanse and purify the inner self from negative qualities and habit such as egoism, self-centrism and to foster compassionate disposition and kindness towards others. The study concludes that the practice of giving is one of the principles which are accepted as one of the most basic human virtues. It plays a vital role in both religions; Islam and Buddhism, and it is always listed as one of the practices in the development of spiritual aspect and sustainability of man's spiritual well-being.

Keywords: Islam, Buddhism, Dana, Almsgiving, Spirituality

Introduction

The practice of giving or charity finds itself in every religion across the world. It is one of the principles which are accepted globally and universally accepted as one of the most basic human virtues. In major world religions, it is also known as *dāna* (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism), *ṣadaqah*, *zakāt* and *waqf* (Islam), charity and *tithe* (Christianity).

In Islam, *Ṣadaqah*, is described by the Quran as a “beautiful loan to God”, for (Allah) will increase it manifold to his credit”, or give those who practice it a great reward”. The practice of giving is significant in Islam as it implies not merely the act to confirm one's genuine servitude and devotion to Allah but also to maintain a harmony in all religious and

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mundane aspect of Muslim life. Muslims are encouraged to practice *ṣadaqah*, to enable them bring themselves closer to his God and attain His divine pleasure. Meanwhile, Buddhism considered *Dāna* as one of the ways to practice benevolence and loving kindness (*metta*) towards others and also meritorious deeds which can help man to attain enlightenment or spiritual enhancement in his life to liberate himself from *samsara*. This article will study the concept of giving (charity) in the two religions and how it affects man's spiritual wellbeing.

The Concept of Almsgiving in Islam

From Islamic point of view, almsgiving can be associated with a variety of titles and terms, such as '*zakāt*', '*waqaf*', '*infāq*', '*ṣadaqah*', 'spending', 'charity', 'lending', and 'feeding'. However, the meanings of each phrase vary from one another, and each name has its own meaning, categorization, importance, and type of distribution, yet they all allude to the concept of almsgiving. Therefore, this topic will be focusing on Islamic terms of almsgiving, notably, *zakāt*, *waqaf*, *infāq*, and *ṣadaqah*.

In the context of almsgiving, Islamic perspectives reflect the proverbial concept that charity begins at home. Every Muslim would be required to assist those in need around him, prioritising family, relatives, and neighbours, in which this act known in Islam as *infāq*. Furthermore, the term *infaq* is related to the word *nafaqa*, which denotes that every Muslim is obligated to earn and spend some of their wealth on family members who are not eligible to receive *zakāh*. For instance, parents must provide basic necessities and education for children so that when they achieve adulthood, they can fulfil their commitments and responsibilities to self, family, nation, and religion. One of the hadiths of the prophet reported by Abu Hurairah supports the concept that charity should begin with those closest to us: Abu Hurairah said: The Messenger of Allah said: "The best of charity is that which is given when you are self-sufficient, and start with those for whom you are responsible".¹

Following the fulfilment of an individual's obligation to his family members and relatives, there will be allocations provided by external resources known as *zakat* and *waqaf*. It emerges only when the first duty has been completed. *Ṣadaqah* is another concept that is recognised as a voluntary act performed by the provider for the benefit of the needy

¹ This hadith is an authentic hadith. Narrated by Abu Huraira. See Sunnah.com, Sunan An-Nasa'i (2544), "The Book of Zakah, Chapter: Which Kind of Charity Is Best?", Accessed on February 14, 2022. <https://sunnah.com/nasai/23>

individual in urgent cases or during emergency periods. However, if it occurs on a regular basis, it should be addressed by other means rather than *ṣadaqah*.¹

Basically, all religions in the world, including man-made religions, are concerned with humanitarian social issues such as poverty and acknowledge that it is their religious duty to provide support and care for the indigents, which can be in the form of almsgiving, food, clothing, shelter, and so on. However, the notion of almsgivings or *zakah* in Islam differs from other religions prior to the arrival of Islam and the Qur'an.

The message of scriptures preceding to the Qur'an regarding almsgiving or *zakāt* is a call for voluntary and individual charity, in which it is dependent on the mercy of the rich and powerful man to help and care for the indigents, while Islam recommends and encourages all humankind to be merciful towards the poor and get rid of stinginess and selfishness. Furthermore, prior religions hold that almsgiving is not an obligatory act for everyone and that there is no punishment for those who do not do so, but in the Qur'an and hadith of the Prophet, *zakāt* is a pillar of Islam that makes it compulsory for all Muslims, and those who do not pay *zakah* would be punished in this life and in the hereafter.²

In addition, human conscience is highly important for other religions that may compel individuals to provide charity, but Islam empowers the state to collect and equitably distribute charity to the poor in accordance with the procedures and regulations that have been established. Other religions give the state no authority for charity collection because there is no specific amount of charity, types of charity, and specific or clear conditions of charity are stated, making it impossible for the state to institutionalise *zakāt* on religious grounds, but Islam specifies the exact amount, types, and conditions of wealth that must be fulfilled to oblige a person to give *zakāt*. Finally, other religions consider that the major aim for caring for or providing alms to the poor is not to deal with poverty or to the degree of abolishing poverty, but rather to relieve their pain and anguish. Islam, on the other hand, comes up with a solution to this issue through recommendations, implementation, and application.³

¹ Ahmet Suayb Gundogdu, "Poverty, Hunger and Inequality in the Context of *Zakat* and *Waqf*", *Darulfunun Ilahiyat*, (May 2019), 30 (1): pp. 49-50.

² Yusuf Al-Qardawi, *Fiqh Al-Zakah: A Comparative Study of Zakah, Regulations and Philosophy in the Light of Quran and Sunnah* (Jeddah: King Abdulaziz University, 2000), p. 6.

³ Yusuf Al-Qardawi, *Fiqh Al-Zakah*...p. 6.

Difference between *Zakat*, *Sadaqah*, *Waqaf* and *Infāq*

Zakāt is one of the five basic religious acts that all Muslims are bound to practice, which are known as the pillars of Islam. Without these acts, one's faith would be considered incomplete. The five pillars are *shahādah* (profession of faith), *ṣolāh* (prayer), *zakaṭ* (alms), *ṣaum* (fasting), and *hajj* (pilgrimage). The third pillar, *zakāt*, is the focus and will be further expanded on in this article. As *zakāt* completes one's religion, it has been recorded in one of the hadith of the Prophet as a response to a query posed by the angel, Jibril, regarding the religion of Islam, specifically "What is Islam?", the hadith was reported by Ibn 'Umar.¹

The Messenger of Allah said, "(The structure of) Islam is built on five (pillars): Testification of "*La ilāha illallah*" (none has the right to be worshipped but Allah), that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger, the establishment of *salāt*, **the payment of *zakāt***, the pilgrimage to the House of Allah (Ka'bah), and *saum* during the month of Ramadan."²

Zakat is an Arabic term that indicates a variety of meanings depending on the context. Literally, the word *zakaṭ* may be translated as 'to grow', 'to increase', 'to improve', and 'to become better'. If the context is about plants, *zakaṭ* means to grow; if it is about goods, *zakaṭ* means to increase; and if it is about people, *zakaṭ* means to improve or become better. *Zakat* as defined by Ibn Manzūr, an author of a famous dictionary, *Lisān al-'Arab* is "cleanliness, growth, blessing, and praise", and all of these meanings are believed to be contained in the Qur'an and the hadith.³

In Sharī'ah, *zakaṭ* denotes to the determined portion or share of wealth that Allah has decreed to be dispersed among eligible groups of people. Besides, it is also used to describe the share payment action. Al-Nawawi, an Islamic jurist and hadith scholar, is of the opinion that, the share of wealth is called *zakaṭ* due to an increase of the funds from which it is taken. In addition to that, Ibn Taymiyyah, an Islamic scholar and theologian views that the individual who pays *zakaṭ* becomes better and his wealth becomes cleansed.⁴ These points of view define the meaning of *zakaṭ* itself and illustrate its mission which is not merely to cleanse and purify one's wealth but also the soul of an individual Muslim.

¹ Yusuf Al-Qardawi, *Fiqh Al-Zakah*...p.17.

² This hadith is an authentic *hadith* agreed upon, Al-Bukhāri and Muslim. See Sunnah.com, Riyadh as-Sālihīn (1206), "The Book of Virtues: Chapter: The Excellence and Obligation of the Payment of *Zakaṭ*". Accessed on December 12, 2021. <https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:1206>

³ Yusuf Al-Qardawi, *Fiqh Al-Zakah*...p. xxxix.

⁴ Yusuf Al-Qardawi, *Fiqh Al-Zakah*...p. xxxix.

In Qur'an there are multiple places and references that mention about *zakat*, however, several terms are used. All of these phrases, including “*ṣadaqah*”, “spending”, “charity”, “lending”, and “feeding” refer to the practice of *zakāh*.¹

Ṣadaqah, according to Abu Bakr bin Al `Arabi, a Muslim judge and Maliki law scholar from al-Andalus, is derived from the word *sidq*, which signifies “truthfulness in realizing declared belief by action”. There is also another view which holds that *sadaqah* entails “giving up goods and funds for the sake of Allah as a demonstration of faithfulness and realisation of the belief in resurrection and the afterlife”. There was a time when the word *sadaqah* was misapplied and misconstrued to refer to “voluntary charitable donations that were given to beggars and destitute”, which occurred prior to the revelation of the Quran, however, the arrival of Islam nullified all of these false interpretations.²

Ṣadaqah in its simplest interpretation is a voluntary deed performed by Muslims for the benefit of needy individuals in times of crisis. However, it is not done on a regular basis especially to similar recipients; otherwise it should be dealt with by alternative means rather than *sadaqah*. It is one of the easiest forms of assistance that one can give in exchange for a generous reward from Allah by building a stronger connection with Him in an attempt to attain nearness to Allah, *maṛḍātillah*.

Waqaf is derived from the Arabic verb ‘*waqafa*’, which means ‘to stop, prevent, or detain’. It is basically the restrictions of moveable or immovable property from the owner (*waqif*) and the dedication of its asset in perpetuity for the welfare of the society. Because of its perpetual nature, *waqaf* is a long-lasting philanthropy, since once an asset is proclaimed *waqaf*, it will stay in perpetuity and the ownership cannot be transferred.³

The Messenger of Allah said, “When a man dies, his deeds come to an end except for three things: *ṣadaqah jariyah* (ceaseless charity); a knowledge which is beneficial, or a virtuous descendant who prays for him (for the deceased)”.⁴

¹ Yusuf Al-Qardawi, *Fiqh Al-Zakah*...p. vii.

² Yusuf Al-Qardawi, *Fiqh Al-Zakah*...pp. xl-xli.

³ Nor Tasik Misbahudin, Abd Halim Mohd Noor, *Development and Contemporary Issues on Waqf in Malaysia*. This is a chapter from the book: *Contemporary Issues in Development in Islamic Social Finance* (Selangor: Mashi Publication, 2017) p.157.

⁴ Sunnah.com, Riyad as-Salihin (1383), “The Book of Knowledge: Chapter: Virtues of Knowledge which is Learnt and Taught for The Sake of Allah”. Accessed on February 14, 2022. <https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:1383>

According to this hadith as reported by Abu Hurayra, *ṣadaqah jariyyah* (good deeds), beneficial knowledge, and pious children are among the eternal actions that would benefit a Muslim even after he dies. The major focus here is *sadaqah jariyyah*, because *waqaf* is best suited to this sort of charity due to its long-term advantages for both the giver and the beneficiaries.

Ṣadaqah can be classified into four types based on the situations; compulsory charity on property (*ṣadaqah wajibah*), compulsory charity on the individual (*ṣadaqah fiṭrah/ wajibah*), compulsory charity on a person when he makes a vow (*nazar*), compulsory charity when someone violates a specific Sharī'ah law (*kafārah* and *fidyah*), and voluntary charity (*ṣadaqah taṭawu'*).¹

Sadaqah differs from other kinds of almsgiving in terms of the system setup to handle it. *Ṣadaqah*, unlike *zakāt* and *waqaf*, has no particular institution that manages it, whereas *zakāt* and *waqaf* are operated and managed by a specific institution setup. Aside from that, the main distinction between *waqaf* and *ṣadaqah* is in terms of the ownership of the property donated, where *waqaf* property is non-transferable to anyone, whether by selling it or as a gift, but *ṣadaqah* property is transferable to anybody.²

Infāq is an Arabic word derived from the word *nafaqa*, which literally means 'to spend with planning'. Theoretically, *infāq* refers to any type of expenditure, however, in Shariah context, *infāq* means to spend for the purpose of seeking Allah's pleasure and for the benefits of the recipients, as well as the welfare of the society as a whole. In the Qur'an, the phrase *infāq* is usually supported by another sentence that specifies what is meant by good *infāq* or spending. The term 'fi sabilillah' which refers to Allah's way, complemented and defined the meaning of *infāq*. Thus, *infāq* is defined as spending in Allah's way.

A several passages in the Qur'an address the encouragement of giving *infāq*. Muslims are advised to manage their income by spending some of it on themselves and some on those closest to them or under their care, such as their wife, family, relatives, and neighbours. It is clearly stated in Surah al-Talaq that Allah requires a man to spend his wealth for his family, which

¹ Mohd Hafiz Bin Mohd Dasar, Prof. Dr Md. Som Sujimon, "The Classical Islamic View Of *Sadaqah*: A Preliminary Study", *International Journal of Islamic Economics and Finance Research* (2018), Vol. 1, No. 2: p. 92.

² Mohd Hafiz Bin Mohd Dasar, Prof. Dr Md. Som Sujimon, "The Classical Islamic View of *Sadaqah*: A Preliminary Study", *International Journal of Islamic Economics and Finance Research*, Vol. 1, No. 2. p. 91.

is under his responsibility, namely wife, children, parents, and siblings based on his capabilities: Let the man of wealth provide according to his means. As for the one with limited resources, let him provide according to whatever Allah has given him. Allah does not require of any soul beyond what He has given it. After hardship, Allah will bring about ease.¹

Under certain circumstances a similar thing can also happen from a wife or mother to spend for her family, for instance, in a condition as a single parent or can also when the husband is not having a job or income. The obligation of *infāq* should be performed in all circumstances and should not be overlooked.²

Furthermore, the term *infāq* can refer to philanthropy, or spending wealth (other than *zakāt*) for the benefit of others, such as supporting indigents, assisting in natural catastrophes, or other humanitarian aids by allocating a portion of the wealth in Allah's way. *Infāq* has no limitations, it is not specified how much the value should be given, and a person is free to donate to anyone he decides, unlike other charities, notably *zakāt*, has limits on how to be issued and to whom will be given as beneficiaries. Regarding the donor, unlike *zakāt*, which is needed from capable Muslims, *infāq* may be given by anyone, privileged or poor, providing everyone the opportunity to contribute in spending their wealth since it is based on their abilities and sincerity.³

The Significance and Purposes of Almsgiving in Islam

Everything Allah has decreed for His servants is not in vain and has its own advantages. When it comes to *zakāt*, there are several virtues and positive impacts that can benefit both the giver and the receiver. The impacts of almsgiving are felt not only on oneself, but also on the social and economic levels.

Firstly, the impacts of almsgiving on an individual, is not merely to cleanse and purify one's wealth but also the soul of an individual Muslim. The drive to love would aid in the cleansing and purification of one's soul, as well as to remove the greed and stinginess within oneself as what has been mentioned by Prophet Muḥammad in his ḥadīth: Allah's Messenger said, "If Adam's son had a valley full of gold, he would like to have two

¹ Surah Al-Talaq: Verse 7.

² M. Aziz Ritonga, Erta Mahyudin, "Review of *Zakat, Infaq, and Shadaqah* as a Similar Terminology", *SCITEPRESS – Science and Technology (2018)*: p. 801.

³ M. Aziz Ritonga, Erta Mahyudin, "Review of *Zakat, Infaq, and Shadaqah* as a Similar Terminology", p. 804.

valleys, for nothing fills his mouth except dust. And Allah forgives him who repents to Him”.¹

Hence, *zakāt* gives impact on oneself in developing positive traits such as kindness, generosity, and empathy for those in need.² The purification of one’s soul has also been mentioned in Qur’an: “Take *ṣadaqah* (charity) from their wealth in order to cleanse them and purify them with it”.³

Besides, the virtue of *zakāt* may result in the acquisition of blessing and the expansion of one’s wealth. As the Best of Providers, Allah has promised to expand, increase, and multiply the riches of the individual who spends his wealth for the sake of Him. In fact, the rewards are boundless and His promise has been written in the Qur’an and ḥadīth of the Prophet “Allah said (to man), “Spend (in charity), for then I will compensate you (generously)”.⁴

“Say, O Prophet, Surely it is my Lord Who gives abundant or limited provisions to whoever He wills of His servants. And whatever you spend in charity, He will compensate you for it. For He is the Best Provider”.⁵

Secondly, *zakāt* contributes to the betterment and elevation of society as a whole. The main benefit is that it assures the welfare of underprivileged individuals such as the needy and indigents, as *zakāt* functions as social and economic security by creating a connection between the wealthy and the indigents, bridging the gap, and instilling love in their hearts. Furthermore, *zakāt* promotes humanitarian culture by motivating wealthy and powerful people to support and care for others, particularly those in need. In short, *zakāt* unites the whole community and encourages love and brotherhood among Muslims community as *zakāt* is the right of the poor embedded in the wealth of the privileged, not a compassionate pity that should be shown by the upper hand (the giver) to the lower hand (the recipient).⁶

¹ This hadith is an authentic hadith. Narrated by Anas bin Malik. Sunnah.com, Sahih al-Bukhari (6439), To make the Heart Tender (Ar-Riqaq), “Chapter: The Fitnah of wealth should be warded off”. Accessed on May 1, 2022. <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6439>

² Muhammad Bin ‘Abdul Aziz, *Fatawa Regarding Fasting & Zakah* (New York: Darussalam, 2002) p. 147.

³ Al-Quran, al-Tawbah (9):103

⁴ This hadith is an authentic hadith. Narrated by Abu Huraira. See sunnah.com, Sahih al-Bukhari (7495), “The Book of Tawhid, Chapter: “...They want to change Allah’s Words...”. Accessed on January 23, 2022. <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:7495>

⁵ Al-Quran, Saba (34):39

⁶ Hossain M.Z, Zakat in Islam: A Powerful Poverty Alleviating Instrument for Islamic Countries, International Journal of Economic Development Research and Investment Vol. 3, No 1, April 2012. p. 3.

Thirdly, in the context of economy and finance, *zakāt* is a blessing from Allah for both the givers and the recipients, since it enhances the entire economy of the nation by minimizing financial crises for the poor and needy and eliminating disparity among different groups of people in society. In addition, *zakāt* assists the receivers in meeting their necessities, minimalizing financial troubles, and alleviating emotional and mental anguish. *Zakāt* would be able to relieve financial difficulties, unemployment and poverty, as well as lowering crime and dissatisfaction in society.¹

Distribution of Almsgiving in Islam

Allah clearly states in the Quran, specifically in Surah Al-Tawbah, the eight groups of people who are eligible as *zakāt* recipients: the poor (*al-fuqarā'*), the needy (*al-masākīn*), the distributors who are involved in *zakāt* collection (*al-amilīn*), those whose hearts are attracted to Islam (*al-muallafah qulubuhum*), those in bondage (*al-riqab*), and the needy travellers (*ibn sabil*): Alms-tax is only for the poor and the needy, for those employed to administer it, for those whose hearts are attracted 'to the faith', for 'freeing' slaves, for those in debt, for Allah's cause, and for 'needy' travellers. 'This is an obligation from Allah. And Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise'.²

Preferably, *zakāt* collection should be distributed to the eligible recipients as soon as the *'amil* or the responsible committee receives the *zakāt* funds, to ensure that the funds are not misused or mismanaged by any parties. The collection of *zakāt* and its distribution follow the concept of localization which has been applied since the era of Prophet Muhammad where he appointed responsible committees to collect *zakāt* funds from Muslims in one particular area and distribute it directly to the eligible recipients at that area, and it was reported that none of the surplus fund was brought back to the Prophet's place.³

However, scholars have different views on the target groups of eligible receivers and the areas of distribution of *zakāt*. Some scholars are of the opinion that *zakāt* can only be distributed among the eight groups of eligible beneficiaries and within the locality of *zakāt* collection, whilst others namely Imam Malik and Imam Abu Hanifah are of the view that the

¹ Hossain M.Z, *Zakat in Islam: A Powerful Poverty Alleviating Instrument for Islamic Countries*, p. 3.

² Surah Al-Tawbah: Verse 60.

³ Monzer Kahf, *Zakah Management in Some Muslim Societies* (Jeddah: IRTI IDB, 2000) p.16.

recipients can be any qualified recipients who are in need even from outside the locale of zakat collection.¹

The Concept of Almsgiving in Buddhism

As stated in the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, the term *dāna* is referring to an act of giving. In Buddhism, the concept of *dāna* is defined differently according to denomination. It is a sort of merit building as defined by Theravada, while in Mahayana it is a kind of donation.² The word *dāna* comes from the root of ‘da’ which means ‘to give’ or ‘to hand over’, while ‘*dāna*’ denotes the act of giving, a meritorious act, munificence, liberality, and a charitable gift for the *bhikkus* or ordained male monastic. The term *dāna* also carries the same meaning and concept as *caga* which means donation, generosity, gift, and offering.³ Literally, it can simply be understood as giving the essential needs to all sentient beings without any prejudice.⁴ There are disputes among authors regarding the origin of the word *dāna* either it is the Pali word or the Sanskrit word, however, both languages are believed to be the ancient and classical Indian languages.

The Significance and Purpose of *Dāna*

Dāna plays a vital role in Buddhism and it is always listed as the first component in the development of spiritual aspect. The Buddhists embark on their *nirvana* quest by performing *dāna*. A person who is on the path towards Buddhahood is called *bodhisattva*. There are ten perfections on the path towards Buddhahood. The first is the perfection of generosity (*dāna paramita*), which is the first stage of *bodhisattva*. Besides that, *dāna* allows *bhikkus* to concentrate on their meditation and divine searching by being stripped of material interest.⁵

The significance of *dāna* is said to be as a relief of human suffering (*dukkha*). Buddhists believe that the cause of suffering is the result of attaching oneself to the temporary world. The practice of *dāna* is viewed as the first step that could help an individual to withdraw oneself from that

¹ Monzer Kahf and Samira Al Yafai, Social Security and Zakāh in Theory and Practice. International Journal of Economics, Management and Accounting 23, no. 2 (2015), p. 200.

² Edward Irons, *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (New York: Facts on File, 2008) p. 140.

³ K. Sankarnarayan, *Dāna (Buddhism)* in the book of *Buddhism and Jainism* (Mumbai: K.J. Somaiya Centre for Buddhist Studies, 2017) p. 335.

⁴ Nguyen Thi Chot, *The Significance of Charity (Dāna) According to Buddhist View* (Delhi: Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research, v2, 2016) p. 1722.

⁵ Agarway, *Daan and Other Giving Traditions in India: The Forgotten Pot of Gold* (New Delhi: Account Aid, 2010) p. 80.

worldly attachment and reorient one's desires by handing over some of what one has for the good of others.¹

Furthermore, *dāna* has become the most important element in eradicating the problems of poverty which has been placed under social responsibility. Besides, Buddhists further contend that assisting the needy is obliged to all their followers regardless of the cause of poverty which might be attributable to one's previous acts or karma.² In addition, one of the precepts in the teaching of Buddha that binds all the Buddhist is known as right action, and this precept can be practiced in two ways; firstly, one should not steal, and secondly, one should practice generosity according to one's ability. Generally, stealing happens due to two main reasons; poverty and compulsion. As for the former, it can be avoided by giving material support to the needy, while for the latter; the thieves should be given counseling or psychiatric help because some of them steal without convincing reasons such as bad habit, peer influence or to get attention. Having sincerely generous people around, may help in reducing or even eradicating thieves.³

The Driving Factors of *Dāna*

Providing support or *dāna* in Buddha's teaching is basically driven by two motivating factors. The first factor is due to the personal inspiration of the people giving the donation for the sake of accumulating good merits. The second factor is guided by people generosity because they consider giving donation is a part of their responsibility and obligation of being Buddhists.⁴ The practice of *dāna* does not merely benefit oneself, but others as well. With regard to merit accumulation and transference to others (*pattidāna*), it is a demonstration of how people show their concern about the welfare of others, while rejoicing the merits of others (*pattanumodāna*), the act is also a form of encouragement for others to collect more merits.⁵

Some people are motivated to give out *dāna* for several reasons such as favoritism, maintaining family tradition, hoping for divine rebirth,

¹ Ellison, *Dāna: Giving and Getting in Pali Buddhism*, p. 186.

² Galston and Hoffenberg, *Poverty and Morality: Religious and Secular Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p. 58.

³ Ven Piyasilo, *The Buddha's Teaching: A Study of Comparative Buddhism in Truth, Tradition, and Transformation* (Petaling Jaya: The Friends of Buddhism Malaysia, 1987), pp. 99-100.

⁴ Bailey and Mabbett, *The Sociology of Early Buddhism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 70-71.

⁵ K. Sri. Dhammananda, *What Buddhists Believe*, Kuala Lumpur: Ti-Ratana Buddhist Society, 2002, p. 204.

expecting something good in return, attaining joy, happiness, and peaceful mind, mellowing heart, and managing fear. Besides, it could also be driven by natural impulse, exasperation, and misapprehension or because of the value of the gift itself.¹ However, despite of all these motives, the only acceptable motives of *dāna* are by virtue of enhancing one's mind as well as eliminating personal greed and selfishness.² Correspondingly, the practice of almsgiving promotes spiritual development by eliminating selfishness, fostering an open-hearted and compassionate disposition towards others, expressing non-attachment and renunciation, and contemplating the practice of giving up or letting go the home and family life to become a monk or nun.³

Moreover, Buddhists believe that *dāna* leads to positive consequences for an individual and others. Among the expected benefits are cleansing of a person's mind, getting rid of hatred, establishing good name as well as pleasing others. Besides, the relationship between the donor and recipient could also be strengthened and regarded as the fulfillment of one's religious ethics.⁴

The Classification of *Dāna*

According to some sources, *dāna* can be classified into two types; profit-charity and pure-charity. As for the former, it applies to an act of offering in exchange for something which can be considered as a bartering act. Examples of profit-charity are when a person carries out charity merely to make people feel indebted, as a means of persuading people into his ideologies, religion, politics, or as a means of exercising control and power over them. The latter is concerned with the act giving without expecting anything in return. This kind of *dāna* would allow people from both parties, the donor and the beneficiary, to live freely without any attached constraints and responsibilities. By performing *dāna*, a person could get rid of selfishness and self-centeredness that are believed to be the roots of greed and suffering.⁵

In general, *dāna* involves two groups of people namely the householder or non-monastic, laity or laymen, and monastic which includes

¹ Agarway, *Daan and Other Giving Traditions in India: The Forgotten Pot of Gold*, p. 92 : K. Sankarnarayan, *Dāna (Buddhism)*, p. 337.

² K. Sankarnarayan, *Dāna (Buddhism)*, p. 337.

³ Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1990) p. 199.

⁴ K. Sankarnarayan, *Dāna (Buddhism)*, p. 337.

⁵ K. Sri. Dhammananda, *What Buddhists Believe*, pp. 218-219.

monks, nuns, and the disciples residing under religious vows. In other words, there is mutual dependence in performing *dāna* to ensure the administration and organization of Buddha's teaching and missionary work can be carried out, preserved, and sustained, otherwise, the spiritual need of the people cannot be fulfilled and the *dhamma* will inevitably cease.¹ In short, the relationship of the laymen and the *sangha* or the Buddhist teachers has been described in Buddha text, Itivuttaka: IV.1.8 as follows:

“This, unquestionably—so has there been heard by me— was stated by the Lord, was stated by the Arahant, viz. “Very useful, monks, are brahmins and householders for you, who present you, in return with robe, almsfood, bed and lodging, and medicinal requisites as a support during sickness. You, too, monks, are very useful for brahmins and householders, in that you teach these Dhamma that is lovely at the beginning, lovely in the middle, lovely at its conclusion, make manifest a Brahmācariya that is with meaning, that is with formulation, that is whole and complete, that is pure. Thus it is, monks, that this Brahmācariya is lived in dependence upon one another, for the sake of crossing over the flood, for rightly making an end of dukkha. [111]²

Each group has different approaches for them to earn merits. For householders, there are three sources of meritorious acts or means of doing good deeds that yield merits, namely, giving (*dāna-maya*), moral conduct (*sīla-maya*), and mental development (*bhāvanā-maya*). *Dāna-maya* or giving can be in the forms of robes, food, shelter, medicine and volunteer works for special ceremonies. The act of giving is believed to eventually benefit the giver in the form of merits that will help the person to earn wealth in the future.³

Besides that, any laymen can also gain merits through simple activities such as looking at wanderers at the door begets merit by the new calmness of their thought, offering renunciants a seat, eliminating stinginess and sharing of food, asking questions regarding the *dharma*, and listening to the *dharma*. While for the *sangha*, who have nothing to give, but they have a huge responsibility to educate the young, such as teaching them to become sympathetic towards others through giving (*dāna*), kindness (*peyya*), doing good deeds (*attha*), and equal treatment of fellows (*samāna*). The *dāna*

¹ Ven Piyasilo, *The Buddha's Teaching: A Study of Comparative Buddhism in Truth, Tradition, and Transformation*, p. 29.

² Translated by Peter Masefield, *The Itivuttaka* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society Oxford, 2001), p. 106.

³ Ven Piyasilo, *The Buddha's Teaching: A Study of Comparative Buddhism in Truth, Tradition, and Transformation*, p. 29.

mentioned earlier refers to *dhammadāna*, which is the obligation of renunciants instead of householder. Furthermore, the givers and the recipients can attain happiness by teaching and listening to the *dharma*.¹

Concerning the subject of *dāna*, it can be broken up into two types; material gift and spiritual gift. For material gift, some sources have listed a few items as worthy gifts, which are robes, alms food, drinks, medicine, unguent, clothes, perfume, beds, lamps, garlands, vehicles, dwelling places, and houses.² However, there are others who have included additional items to the list of worthy gifts such as wealth, part of body (donating blood/ eyes/ kidney), family (wife/children), and even poison if only it can be useful. While spiritual gifts include allocation of one's time, energy, effort, skill, knowledge, or wisdom, which is the most important gift, specifically for teaching *dhamma* to others.³

In addition, Buddhists also view that giving can be in the form of fearless acts such as by providing shelter and security to those in fear and without harming others.⁴ This type of *dāna* is not only applicable to mankind, but to all living things. Giving also includes listening with empathy and providing counseling for people facing problems. Nevertheless, the most valuable and priceless gift is the *dharma*, because it leads to the most desirable result which is to experience happiness in this world and in the hereafter, as stated in Buddha text, Dhammapada verse 354: "The gift of the Dhamma surpasses other gifts, the taste of the Dhamma surpasses other tastes, the love of the Dhamma surpasses other loves, destruction of craving overcomes suffering".⁵

There are another two subdivisions of *dāna*; the transference of merits to others (*pattidāna*) and rejoicing in the merits of others (*pattanumodāna*). The transference of merits to others happens when one performs good deeds and the doer wishes to pass the merits to other people who are still alive or already died. While rejoicing in the merits of others is done when the one who is going to receive the merits feels happy and says "sadhu!" which means "well done!" for the deeds performed. However, the act of transference of merits is an ancient custom and belief, although it still exists today, but its origin and significance are still debatable among the scholars

¹ K. Sri. Dhammananda, *What Buddhists Believe*, p. 204.

² K. Sankarnarayan, *Dāna (Buddhism)*, p. 336.

³ K. Sri. Dhammananda, *What Buddhists Believe*, p. 220.

⁴ Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 207.

⁵ Translated by Ānandajoti Bhikkhu, *Dhamma Verses* (1st ed., 2016), p. 298.

and only a few Buddhists who truly understand the meaning of the action and know how to perform it properly.¹

The Distribution of *Dāna*

Giving donation or *dāna* has become the common practice for laypersons who visit the temples or monasteries. Regarding the person who are worthy of receiving gifts, *dāna* is worth more for distribution to the *sangha* rather than non-monastic men, and the reward would also be more bountiful. Apart from *sangha*, those who possess certain personal qualities are also the most preferred recipients of *dāna*. The qualities are virtuous, learned, adept, having right views and wisdom, having many good friends, goal getter, and achieving a convenient state of life. However, to render all the beneficiaries worthy for the *dāna*, they should exempt themselves from these negative characters such as lustful, hatred, delusion, greedy, and unintelligent.² It would be inconceivable if the *dāna* is given to these types of people such as vicious, foes, pretenders, repeated offenders, furious, revilers, ungrateful, affluent, powerful, non-believers in causality, and coercive solicitors.³

The most commendable donors are those who deliver the gift in season, possess a sense of conviction, and carry out their good deeds conscientiously and compassionately without hurting and aggrieving anyone. These donors are called givers of integrity.⁴ As far as the sources of the *dāna* are concerned, the Buddhist donors are divided into small, large, individual and institutional. The most supportive donors come from individual families in specific villages.⁵ It is believed that the financial assistance has been derived from class fees, fund raising, and the pledged donations from supporters who are either working or earning social security benefits.⁶

The Practice of Giving and its Impacts on Man's Spiritual Wellbeing

From the view of Islamic perspective, *ṣadaqah* is one of the righteous deeds that help in the cleansing and purifying the inner being from ill and maladies. The purification of one's soul through giving practice has been mentioned in Qur'an: "Take *ṣadaqah* (charity) from their wealth in order to cleanse them and purify them with it".⁷ In actual fact, zakāh is practiced

¹ K. Sri. Dhammananda, *What Buddhists Believe*, pp. 395-397.

² Agarway, *Daan and Other Giving Traditions in India: The Forgotten Pot of Gold*, pp. 89-90.

³ Nguyen Thi Chot, *The Significance of Charity (Dāna) According to Buddhist View*, p. 1724.

⁴ K. Sankarnarayan, *Dāna (Buddhism)*, pp. 336-338.

⁵ Bailey and Mabbett, *The Sociology of Early Buddhism*, pp. 70-71.

⁶ Ken Jones, *The Social Face of Buddhism* (London: Wisdom Publication, 1989) p. 219.

⁷ Surah At-Tawbah: 103.

with the purpose of cleansing and purifying both human soul and the wealth together. *Ṣadaqah* helps to purify the inner self from negative attitude such as egoism and self-centricity.

The practise of giving helps the giver to eliminate self-arrogance and 'ujub (pride themselves) from their hearts and extend his benevolence, generosity and kindness towards recipient. As for the Beneficiary, by receiving *zakāt*, it aids to eliminate negative qualities such as hatred and jealousy. Thus, the practice of giving helps to build the relationship between the wealthy and the indigents, as *zakāt* serves to bridge the gap between the two sides and instil love in their hearts.

Furthermore, the drive to love would aid in the cleansing and purification of one's soul, as well as to remove the greed and stinginess within oneself. Hence, Muslims are developing positive traits such as kindness, generosity, and empathy for those in need.¹ It is undeniable that this positive quality resulted from the practice of giving would sustain the wellbeing of man's spiritual life.

The practice of giving also is a mean to confirm one's genuine servitude and devotion to God. "By no means shall you attain to righteousness until you spend (benevolently) out of what you love; and whatever thing you spend, Allah surely knows it".² The act of giving is one of the means to attain piety and great religious reward from Allah including His forgiveness and divine pleasure. "If ye loan to Allah, a beautiful loan, He will double it to your (credit), and He will grant you Forgiveness: for Allah is most Ready to appreciate (service), Most Forbearing."³ The association of *ṣadaqah* with spiritual reward of forgiveness would motivate Muslims to practice giving as it will help man to sacrifice his personal interest for others in order for him to attain God's pleasure and this will essentially leads to sustainability of man's spiritual wellbeing.

In Buddhism, the practice of giving, is believed, that it will aid man in his efforts to purify the mind. Generous gifts accompanied by wholesome volition help to eradicate suffering. It also has contributed in some measure "to buddhist spiritual distinction, great delight (*pamuḥḥa*) arises in man. Joy (*pīti*) arises in the mind that is delighted. When the mind is joyful the body relaxes (*kayo passambhissati*). When the body relaxes a sense of ease (*sukha*) is experienced which helps the mind to be concentrated (*cittam samadhiyissati*). That will help the development of the spiritual faculties

¹ Muhammad Bin 'Abdul Aziz, *Fatawa Regarding Fasting & Zakah* (New York: Darussalam, 2002) p. 147.

² Surah Āli Imrān: 92

³ Surah Al-Taghābun: 17.

(*indriyabhavana*), spiritual powers (*balahbavana*), and factors of enlightenment (*bojjhangabhavana*)”.¹

Dāna promotes spiritual development by eliminating selfishness, fostering an open-hearted and compassionate disposition towards others, expressing non-attachment and renunciation, and contemplating the practice of giving up or letting go the home and family life to become a monk or nun.

It also leads to positive consequences for an individual and others. Among the expected benefits are cleansing of a person’s mind, getting rid of hatred, establishing good name as well as pleasing others. Besides, the relationship between the donor and recipient could also be strengthened and regarded as the fulfillment of one’s religious ethics.²

Conclusively, the practice of giving is one of the principles which are accepted globally and universally accepted as one of the most basic human virtues. It plays a vital role in both religions; Islam and Buddhism, and it is always listed as one of the practices in the development of spiritual aspect.

Conclusion

The discussion of almsgiving or charity in Islam is broad and covers various concepts such as *zakāt*, *ṣadaqah*, *waqaf*, and *infāq*. However, all of these names allude to the same act of almsgiving. The Quranic verses and hadith statements show that the definition of charitable giving in Islam differs from the common definition of charity, which is aimed to help the needy for the sake of mankind, whereas almsgiving in Islam is meant to help the needy not only for the sake of mankind but also to gain Allah’s love and blessings.

The practice of giving purifies the giver from selfishness and indifference, and purifies the recipient from the feelings of haltered against the wealthy people. Thus, it creates love for others in the individual and saves him from self-indulgence and ego-centricity. It brings the people closer to each other and ensures real brotherhood in the true sense of the word and spirit.

Similarly, the practice of giving in Buddhism promotes spiritual development by eliminating selfishness, fostering an open-hearted and

¹ Ari Ubeysekara, Dana: Giving in Theravada Buddhism, Drarisworld, September 3, 2016, accessed on 29th December, 2022.

<https://drarisworld.wordpress.com/2016/09/03/dana-giving-in-theravada-buddhism/>

² Susan Elbaum Jootla, The Practice of Giving, *Dana: The Practice of Giving*, Edited by Bhikku Bodhi, 1995. Accessed on 29th.December, 2022.

<https://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/various/wheel367.html>

compassionate disposition towards others, expressing non-attachment and renunciation, and leads to enlightenment.

Obviously, the impact of almsgiving is not merely in the cleansing and purification of the soul of an individual and one's wealth and but also lead towards the development of nation and country and thus "The (Wealth) may not circulate solely among the rich".¹

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¹ Al-Hasyr: 7

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