

Zakat and Khums

Zakat

In Arabic, 'zakat' means 'that which purifies'. It is an obligatory donation used to relieve the suffering of others beyond the minimum wealth necessary for survival. Wealth is acceptable, but hand-in-hand with wealth is the duty to share with and support others. The aim of zakat is to purify wealth by limiting the desire for acquisition, and turning excess over to others, with the ultimate aim of pleasing God. In *Sura 2.3* we learn that those who live in awareness of God will ...:

'... believe in the Unseen, and maintain the prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them'

(See al-quran.info/#2:3)

A proportion of wealth is given at the end of each year. It can be given to a mosque, which then distributes zakat donations in a systematic way, or to a charity like the National Zakat Foundation. Zakat is given to people in specific need, not just one's own friends or relations, hence the use of bodies who ensure its proper distribution.

Sura 9.60 notes what zakat is to be spent on:

'Charities are only for the poor and the needy, and those employed to collect them, and those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and for [the freedom of] the slaves and the debtors, and in the way of Allah, and for the traveller.

[This is] an ordinance from Allah, and Allah is all-knowing, all-wise'

(See al-quran.info/#9:60)

In Sunni Islam

Zakat is one of the Five Pillars of Sunni Islam. It means giving 2.5 per cent of wealth accrued from assets, savings and money earned through trade.

In Shi'a Islam

Zakat is one of the Ten Obligatory Acts of Shi'a Islam. It means giving 2.5 per cent of wealth accrued from the profits of business transactions. This means Shi'a Muslims might give less zakat than Sunni Muslims, but Shi'a Muslims also make khums donations (see below).

In Shi'a Islam, zakat is received and distributed by the Grand Ayatollahs (experts in Islamic teaching).

Read Chris Hewer's support notes for GCSE, where he links zakat with the notion of *sadaqah*:

www.chrishewer.org/live/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Money-to-those-in-need.pdf

Khums

In Arabic, 'khums' means 'one-fifth'. Khums is obligatory for Shi'a Muslims and is an additional donation to zakat. Khums is given for social welfare, particularly education.

Its roots lie in *Sura 8.41*:

'Know that whatever thing you may come by, a fifth of it is for Allah and the Apostle, for the relatives and the orphans, for the needy and the traveller'

(See al-quran.info/#8:41)

One-fifth, or 20 per cent, of annual profit (after expenses have been met) is given to:

- those who are descended from the Prophet, called 'Sayyid' or 'Sayed' in Shi'a culture
- the Shi'a establishment, in the form of the Grand Ayatollahs as representatives of the Hidden Imam, who will distribute the khums to appropriate projects