

ISLAM

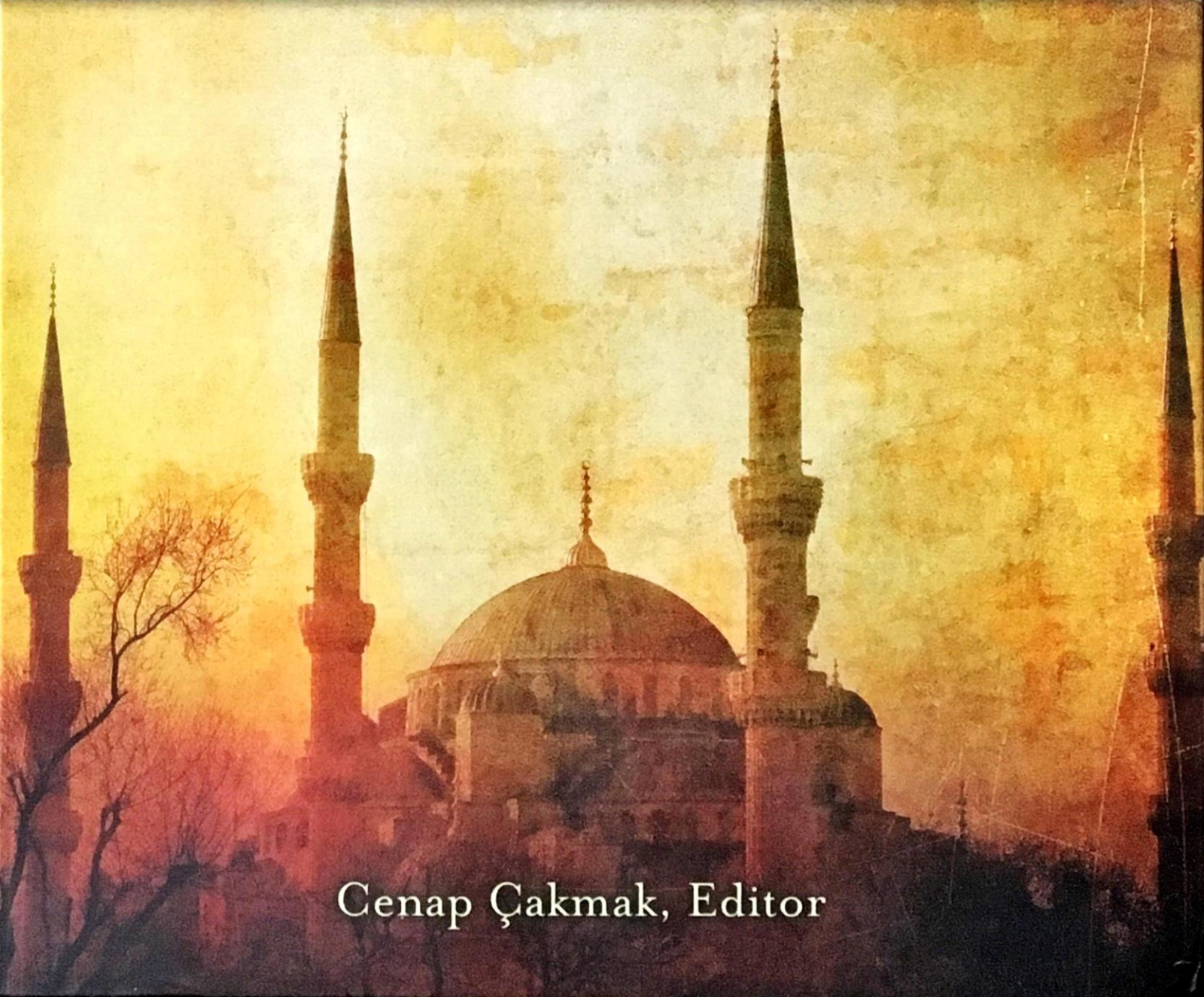
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Cenap Çakmak, Editor

There is no other way to know Allah except for what has been described in the preserved divine revelations and whatever has been told by the prophets and messengers of Allah sent for the guidance of humankind. This is why Muslim followers are advised by Islamic thinkers and scholars to rely on these major sources for a better and proper comprehension of Allah.

Shams uz Zaman

See also: Al-Rabb; al-Rahman; God; *Haqq*; Islam; Quran

Further Reading

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- Hulusi, Ahmed. *Mohammed's Allah: Allah as Introduced by Mohammed*. Reprint ed. Translated by Ahmed Baki. Istanbul: Kitsan Publishers, 2004.
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Alms (*Zakat*)

Zakat is both a social and economic mechanism as well as a religious duty prescribed for every Muslim who fulfills certain requirements and conditions under Islam. The main goal of *zakat* is, without compromising the right to private property, to ensure fair distribution of economic and financial assets among people, reduce poverty, and attain social justice. A multifunctional and multidimensional duty and mechanism, *zakat* is strongly emphasized in the Quran, which often mentions it together with *salat* (obligatory prayer) that has to be performed on a daily basis. *Salat* is meant to serve as a means of spiritual purification and establishment of the connection with Allah, whereas *zakat* is supposed to purify both movable and immovable properties. Because of its social and religious importance, both Prophet Muhammad and his companions placed great emphasis on the collection of *zakat*. The first righteous caliph, Abu Bakr, even waged a war against those Muslims who refused to pay *zakat*.

Even though Prophet Muhammad strongly encouraged different forms of charity in the initial years of Islam, *zakat* was prescribed as one of the main pillars of Islam and an indispensable religious obligation in the Medina era. The Quran, while prescribing it as an obligation, also added different dimensions to the concept of *zakat*, making it more comprehensive than it was in the pre-Islamic era. The Quran mentions *zakat* and its derivatives 59 times in 58 verses. Most of these

mentions connote purification of assets and wealth through charity and refer to social solidarity and institutionalized taxation as well. In 26 of these verses, *zakat* is mentioned together with *salat*.

Initially, Muslims performed the *zakat* ritual and practice on an individual basis; they picked the party they would deliver the charity to. However, the central authority assumed the role of collecting and then redistributing the *zakat* monies after the establishment of a city-state in Medina. Prophet Muhammad appointed 25 officials to collect *zakat* monies. In the Umayyad era, the scope of taxable items was expanded; not only monies but also livestock as well as agricultural products were defined as subjects of *zakat*. The state authority still held full control in the collection and distribution of the *zakat* monies and items. Interestingly, however, some historians note that the model employed since the late Medina era was modified significantly, particularly in some areas of the Muslim world, because almost all people were rich enough that they were not eligible to receive charity. In these areas, the individuals were allowed to determine the amount of *zakat* money they would pay and the party they would give it to.

Zakat can be considered as tax monies and revenues of the state in the Medina era and the period of righteous caliphs. Initially, all form of taxes except levies imposed on non-Muslims fell into the category of *zakat*. But the current practice is extremely different. According to the most popular approach, *zakat* now refers to a 40th of annual revenue. The current practice constitutes only a small portion of the *zakat* definition upheld in the classical era of Islam.

It can be argued that some practices in the period of the third righteous caliph Osman may have caused the change in the perception of *zakat*. In this period, the Islamic state had expanded through conquests and invasions. This raised some problems in collection of the *zakat* monies; in addition, it was particularly costly to collect *zakat* monies of Muslims in remote parts because their number was quite small. For this reason, to avoid costly collection procedures, *zakat* was redefined in line with recommendations by experts. In brief, *zakat* was divided into two categories: *mal al-zahir* (apparent property) and *mal al-batin* (hidden property). The state revenues collected by public officials were defined as taxes, whereas the monies that individuals voluntarily paid were called *zakat* in this categorization.

Islam clearly identifies who is obligated to pay *zakat* and who is eligible to receive it. A Muslim has to pay *zakat* if he or she is free, reaches the ages of maturity, and holds a certain amount of wealth. Those who fulfill these conditions are liable for paying some portion of their wealth. In general, 2.5 percent of the wealth has to be paid as *zakat* money; however, there are also different prescriptions for other items and assets. For instance, 10 percent of agricultural production and 25 percent of a treasure should be paid as alms.

Eight groups of people are eligible to receive *zakat* money: the poor (*al-fuqara*, low income or indigent), the needy (*al-masakin*, someone who is in difficulty), *zakat* administrators (*al-amilin*, public servants who are appointed to collect *zakat* monies), those whose hearts are to be reconciled (*muallafa al-kulub*), those in bondage (*riqab*, slaves and servants), the debt-ridden (*gharimin*), in the cause of Allah (*fi sabil al-Allah*), and the wayfarer (*ibn al-sabil*, those who travel with few resources).

This categorization is offered in the Quran; however, currently the major schools of jurisprudence hold different approaches on *zakat* transactions. For Hanbalis, individuals are responsible for distributing the *zakat* money. For Hanafis and Shafi'is, on the other hand, only hidden properties can be subject to individual transaction. It is the responsibility of the state authority to check if *zakat* money has actually been paid properly even though the individual is obligated to honor this religious duty.

Zakat is an important pillar of Islam, strongly fortified and underscored by the Quran and the hadiths as well. In addition to a religious duty, *zakat* also serves as the foundation of a social solidarity mechanism and system and plays significant roles in the attainment of social justice and economic stability. Because of its significance, every Muslim who meets the requirements has to make a *zakat* payment at least once a year.

Murat Ustaoglu

See also: Charity in Islam; *Fitr*; Islamic Economy; Medina; Righteous Caliphs; *Plate 9*

Further Reading

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al-Nasa'i

Abu Abd al-Rahman Ahmad ibn Shu'ayb b. Ali al-Nasa'i was a Muslim scholar best known for authoring the *al-Mujtaba*, a collection of traditions (hadiths). His collection of hadiths is counted among the six canonized Sunni hadith books (*al-kutub al-sitta*).