

Muslims and money in Britain today: an enquiry

These pages present many sources for understanding the Muslim practice of giving to charity and to help those less fortunate. We're grateful to religious educators Shazia Iqbal, Aisha Mohammad and Samera Qureshi for their observations on British Muslim practice with regard to Zakat, and to the 10 Muslim pupils, all under 14, who gave us the quotations below. The activity might work with older primary pupils, but there is good learning here for GCSE or standard grade as well.

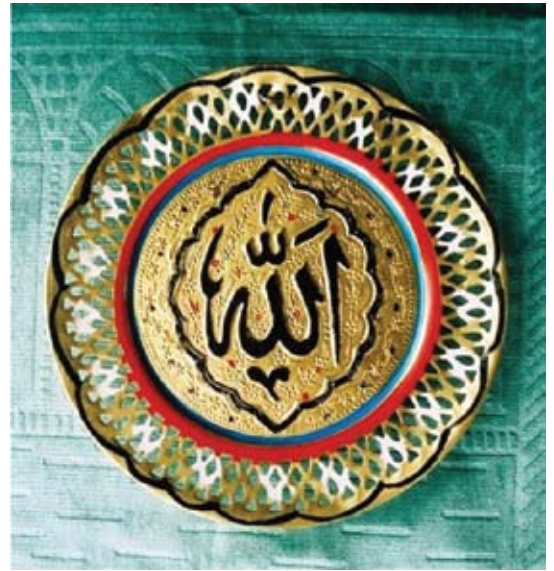
Copy the materials, and ask pupils in groups to explore these questions:

Who should give money to help those less fortunate? Why?

They are invited to enquire into the questions from Muslim viewpoints, from their own and from other religious viewpoints as well if they wish. Pupils might start their enquiry with the ten short quotations (which one tells us most?), then add all they can to their answers from the longer accounts on the next page.

Searching for answers to these five questions will also help pupils to read and learn:

- What is Zakat? How and why do Muslims pay Zakat? (Find and explain at least four reasons.)
- What is the impact of Zakat on the Muslim communities in Britain today? What difference does it make?
- How do young Muslims learn the value and significance of Zakat?
- How does the example of the Prophet inspire the practice of Zakat?
- What varies about Zakat around the world and across the generations?
- If everyone practised Zakat, how would our country change?
- What matters more: motives or actions, attitudes or activity?



'Charity makes you aware of those less fortunate, and it disciplines you.'

'Our Prophet said that whoever is good to the poor pleases God.'

'Money isn't everything. This pillar reminds us of all the best things in life, and to help the needy.'

'One of my uncles was very poor when he first came to Britain, and he was given money to help him from the mosque. He's well off now, and the most generous man I know.'

'This pillar is a training programme in which I feel for the poor, plus I can try and help.'

'We like to give Zakat because we get the feel of how it is for poor people when they have no food to eat, and we realise not to waste.'

'Muslims are to think about the poor and needy, who go many days on end without food.'

'Islamic Relief is a big Muslim charity which uses Zakat to help those who are needy all over the world.'

'When you give money away, you're not thinking "I could have spent that." You're thinking "Allah has been good to me." It makes you thankful.'

'Giving is good.'

Three Muslims comment on Zakat for RE Today:

Samera says: I think the humble, kind and subtle way of the prophet's charity makes you want to give even the little that you can. That can be a smile, helping a stranger or buying someone on the streets a meal. I live in a Pakistani Muslim Community; I believe Zakat has a positive effect on the community. Every year in Ramadan, towards the end of the month of fasting, people from different charities across the world will come to appeal for their charities and one is able to make a donation of their Zakat. A lot of Pakistani families see it as an opportunity to help the poor back in their own country, Pakistan.

I guess young Muslims learn about charity as they grow up in households where Zakat is paid, and most will learn the value of it to Muslims in the mosque as well. Most parents will teach their children the importance of this kind act. The growth of Muslim – and other – charities in Britain is brilliant, especially for someone like me who is a British-born Muslim. My parents will send their Zakat to Pakistan but I feel that you are spreading it out more evenly when paying an organisation, which will help poor people across the world.

Shazia says: The Prophet (pbuh) lived a very simple life and would even give away every little thing he had, even food when he didn't have much. In the modern age we have much more than people had in previous times and therefore we can spare more.

Zakat is taken very seriously! The majority of Muslim people, regardless of how religious they are, tend to keep this pillar vigilantly. Zakat is mainly given in Ramadan: Muslims are encouraged to give first to poor members of their own families, for instance orphans or single-parent families who are struggling. People also give to charities such as Islamic Relief or Muslim Hands.

Well-organised mosques teach Muslim children about the Five Pillars, how to pray, respect for all, and the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Children also learn the importance of charity because they will see their parents giving Zakat every year. In Ramadan mosques tend to be fuller: even young Muslims who don't visit the mosque all year tend to go. Every day people will be giving Zakat and sometimes this is announced in the mosque to encourage and remind others. As a parent I would explain myself to my children about Zakat, when I give it myself. Charity and helping the poor is a big part of Islam and most children will be encouraged from a young age. Second- and third-generation UK Muslims are more likely to give money to charities like Islamic Relief. Older Muslims tend to send money to relatives and give money to the mosque.

Aisha says: In Islam each action is judged by its intention. I think that if you gave money away but with the intention of showing off to friends, it is better not to give the money. Be generous but do it with the right thought. You should not feel guilty or be thinking about the money long after you have given it away. So I would say it is the attitude that matters.

By giving charity it reminds people that your wealth can be taken away from you just as easily as it is given. I think it is good that you have to give a certain amount – it means that everyone gives the same percentage but will be personalised according to their wealth.

Our society would change if everyone followed the Third Pillar of Islam and gave £1 to the poor for each £40 they earned. I think society would become less selfish and it may promote equality if people understood that everyone was to follow this.

I have been giving Zakat for quite a while now. I can't remember when I started but it was more to do with me wanting to give money to the poor rather than Zakat actually becoming a duty. I give Zakat because I have gold jewellery, like most Asian women. Due to it the weight of it and the fact that the value increases, Zakat goes up every year! I do one of two things, either give all the money for Zakat to my dad who then sends it to Pakistan where he knows it will be given to people who are in need, or I donate the money to a charity like Islamic Relief. I only just realised last year that Zakat can be given to community centres that belong to the mosque but not the mosque itself. In this way Zakat can aid others to learn about Islam.

Money in today's society is almost a religion! I think that a materialistic society creates greed which cannot be satisfied. I think people have forgotten to live with what they have.

I would also like to stress that Muslims can give charity to non Muslims. I often find people misinterpret the religion and think that we only help other Muslims. I often give to various charities and I like to see the reaction that people get seeing a Muslim donating to a charity that is not associated with Muslims!

Some planned work about Islamic Relief

Key questions	Learning objectives	Teaching and learning	Learning outcomes	Points to note
Giving alms is the Third Pillar of Islam. How and why do Muslims give?	Pupils should learn: about the practice and impact of Zakah. to think about generosity, fairness and equality in the light of the practices of Zakah.	Almsgiving: 'Zakah' – Third Pillar of Islam <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research Muslim charity or almsgiving – Zakah, and the ways in which Muslims help and care for the worldwide Muslim community (Ummah). Discuss why and how Zakah is performed and who benefits. Consider the importance of generosity in their own lives: who is generous to you, and to whom are you generous? Why, and how does this make a difference? 	Pupils will be able to: describe the practice of almsgiving and Zakah in Islam, and make links to their own experiences (L3).	This unit can easily link with Citizenship.

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<p>How and why does Islamic Relief try to change the world?</p>	<p>Pupils should learn: to describe the work of a religious charity involved in global poverty issues to make links between the beliefs and teachings of Islam and the work of charities to show their understanding of the issues of justice, fairness and poverty that charities address.</p>	<p>Learning about Islamic Relief</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hear a story of the Prophet about wealth and poverty, and identify attitudes that help the poor and attitudes that don't. • Look at some sayings and teachings of Islam about the Ummah, Zakat and wealth and poverty, and consider what difference they would make to life today if everyone followed them. This will include the practices of Zakat in some detail. • Use the web and published resources to discover more about the charity Islamic Relief. Find out about some particular projects the charity has undertaken, and ask and answer questions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who supports Islamic Relief? Why? • What does Islamic Relief do to make a difference? Does it work? • Does Islamic Relief follow the teachings of Islam? In what ways? • What do you think is good about the charity? • If you were devising an internet campaign from Islamic Relief to get more donations to respond to a particular disaster, what web pages, emails and other resources would you use? How would you make the fundraising successful? 	<p>Pupils will be able to: retell a story of the Prophet about wealth (L2) suggest meanings and ideas from Islamic teachings (L2) describe the work of the charity in speaking and listening and in writing (L3) apply ideas about Zakat, Ummah and generosity for themselves (L4).</p>	<p>This unit draws in global dimensions of the Citizenship curriculum at every point.</p>
<p>How do two global religious charities use the web? Could they do better?</p>	<p>Pupils should learn: to evaluate the ways in which charity websites work for themselves.</p>	<p>Weighing up two websites:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The websites for both charities have sections for children: Islamic Relief Kidzone and Christian Aid's Global Gang http://www.islamicrelief.com/submenu/Kids/kidzone.htm http://www.globalgang.org.uk/ . • Ask pupils to use and weigh up the websites. What are they trying to achieve? What use are they? Could they be improved? They might use these criteria: Is it interesting? Is it educational? Will it increase support for the charity? How could it be improved? • Ask pupils to make a list of five things that are good about each and make three detailed suggestions about how they could be improved. 	<p>Pupils will be able to: use the web to research the work of the two charities describe and understand the strengths and weaknesses of the charity websites (L3-4).</p>	<p>ICT skills: this activity is about weighing up information, a key skill for the young web user. It connects to the ICT curriculum for Y5.</p>

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Are Christian Aid and Islamic Relief similar or different?	Pupils should learn: to understand what is similar and what is distinctive about each of these two charities.	Similar and different <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify similarities and differences between the two charities • Consider whether they could merge and make one charity – or are best working together, but being separate. 	Pupils will be able to: make links between the work of the two charities, pointing out and beginning to explain similarities and differences (L3-4).	Comparison is a demanding skill for this age group, best tackled in pairs.
Will I make a difference to the world in my life?	Pupils should learn: to apply ideas about community, fairness and justice for themselves to consider the challenges of belonging to the Muslim faith with regard to wealth and poverty.	Viewpoints and attitudes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the idea that generosity or kindness can change the world. Pupils share and develop their own concepts of helping each other, and think about ideas of Ummah (Islam) or fellowship (Christianity). • What has made our world so unfair? What can be done to make it fairer? Can children make a difference? Can people 'make poverty history'? • Use some reflective work or silence. Ask pupils to write a meditation, prayer or other text that expresses their response to unfairness in the world. Ask them to devise a logo or image to show why everyone should work against the evils of disaster and poverty. (Examples of children's work on these topics can be seen from late in 2006 on the web gallery: www.natre.org.uk/spiritedarts, and pupils can enter a competition there.) 	Pupils will be able to: respond sensitively to the need for generous and thoughtful action to combat injustice or to respond to disasters (L2). understand the impact of charities like these two on problems and issues of global fairness and justice (L4).	The challenge of the charities is not specific to one religion: all faiths, and non-religious ways of life, raise this challenge.