

فَرِيضَةٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ

Isn't Zakat a Pillar of Islam?

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Zakat is a pillar of Islam. Allah (swt) has called it “an ordinance from Allah [9:60]”, a criterion for being counted among Muslims [9:11] and has joined it with Salat at numerous places in the Quran [e.g., 2:43].

Muslims are taught from the elementary school onwards that Zakat is among the five pillars of Islam. However, Muslims in general, including our community in metropolitan Chicago, have not done nearly as much for the establishment of this pillar as we have for the other pillars. Examples of what we do for the establishment of Salat, Hajj and Fasting are abundant, whereas those for Zakat are scarce. As a result, Zakat appears to be the least established pillar in community awareness as well as practice. When fully practiced Zakat could produce \$50 million locally that would do wonders for the local community.

Zakat is a very special kind of charity – special in many ways. It does not apply to the income, but it applies only to the savings (liquid assets) that have been in possession for a full year. A small percentage of such assets is required to be removed as Zakat. The word means purity and implies purifying the assets and overcoming one's attachment to and greed for material possessions. The ownership of Zakat is to be transferred to those in need.

Allah (swt) has promised numerous blessings to Zakat givers [2:261] and severe consequences for those who ignore it [3:180]. We tend to give Zakat during Ramadan for the obvious reasons that the blessings are multiplied in this month.

You may give your Zakat to organizations of your choice. Several mosques are well-established to receive Zakat and distribute it to individuals in dire needs who visit the mosques. Zakat Chicago is a central zakat institution. It is setup to receive Zakat as a one-stop service and distribute it **LOCALLY** to fulfill multiple deserving needs in the metropolitan area, such as food pantries, health and senior services, educational projects and others. Efforts are also underway to do more to establish Zakat locally as a pillar of Islam.

Mohammed Kaiseruddin is the current Chairman of Zakat Chicago.