

Peace Through Charity in Islam by Dr. Rukhsana Rahma

This article is to be printed in the Gettysburg Times on September 26, 2016 (Dr. *Rahman* is the recipient of ICPJ peacemaker of the Year Award in 2012 and MLK Living the Dream Award in 2016.)

Recently Muslims around the world celebrated *Eid-al-Adha*, festival of sacrifice, second Muslim holiday, commemorating Prophet Abraham's complete faith in God and his willingness to sacrifice his son. Other Muslim holiday being *Eid-al-Fitr* or festival of breaking fast celebrates completion of month of fasting (*Ramadan*). Both have a central theme of sacrificing and giving.

Charity (*Zakat*) central to Muslims requires them to give 2.5% of their wealth in annually; to ensure that the poor and needy benefit from it, there are strict rules regarding this. In an authentic *Hadith* (narrative) Mohammed said "even a smile is charity if one has nothing else to give". Sacrifice; also regarded as charity, encouraged throughout the year is more so during the month of fasting and the first ten days preceding the second Eid. Though the main reason for fasting during *Ramadan* is as an act of devotion to God and strengthen ones faith, it also inculcates gratitude and promotes empathy for the less fortunate.

For centuries Arabia was rife with tribal violence and wealth inequity. This changed when Prophet Muhammad began to get the revelations that were eventually compiled as the *Qur'an* (recitation). The basic message of the *Qur'an* is - it is wrong to build private fortunes and better to share your wealth in order to shape a just society where the poor and vulnerable are treated with respect and dignity. Instead of aggression *Qur'an* proposed mercy (*hilm*). People of *hilm* were patient, calm, and merciful even in the toughest times. They looked after the poor, orphans, widows and destitute, feeding the hungry even when they were hungry themselves; they responded to insults by saying peace or "*Salam*". Prophet said, "Charity is prescribed for each descendant of Adam every day the sun rises". When asked how, he replied "The doors to goodness are many...enjoining good, forbidding evil, removing harm from the road, listening to the deaf, leading the blind, guiding one to the object of his need, hurrying to one in sorrow or asking for help and supporting the feeble...all these are charity prescribed for you".

Millions perform the *Hajj* (pilgrimage) in Mecca on days preceding this holiday. During our pilgrimage in 2008 we were constantly reminded of Mohammed's saying, "Not one of you can be a believer unless he desires for his neighbour what he desires for himself". Mohammed asked his followers to surrender their egos to the one God (*Allah*- the Arabic word for God) and pay *Zakat* ("purification") to cleanse their hearts of arrogance and selfishness. The *Qur'an*, Muslims feel is sent by God as a "gift of inner peace" so they can respond to aggression with calmness and peace. All the mosques (*masajids*) in USA and numerous credible organizations are set up to help distribute these donations.

Karen Armstrong says, "Each world religion has its own particular genius, its own special insight into the nature and requirements of compassion". Mohammed said, "Give in charity without delay, for it stands in the way of calamity".