



The world of Islam

This is, or should be, the happiest season of the year — the time when we celebrate the holy month of Ramadan and the festival of Eid, except that we must keep in mind and pray for the casualties of the pandemic, and hardships of the poor, and the ongoing threat of the coronavirus.

Life must go on, however, and we all, in our separate ways, thank Allah every day for the abundance He has bestowed upon us. While life is a blessing for those who have loving families and sincere friends, we should also turn our thoughts to those who are less fortunate than us, and give more in charity of every sort.

Charity does not consist of donating just money and goods. True charity is a matter of the heart. It comes from feeling a sense of brotherhood, kindness, and a spirit of forgiveness for all. There are 1.9 billion Muslims worldwide, a billion residing in just six countries, while the remaining numbers are spread out all over the world.

Millions of the faithful go on pilgrimage to Makkah every year. I never cease to be impressed by the sight of the thousands of devotees who gather in prayer every day in mosques all over the world. It is a testimony to the power of our faith and our beliefs and our traditions.

And yet, in spite of the virtues that Islam encourages us to practice, and the spirit of universal brotherhood that our



Holy Prophet (PBUH) exhorted upon us, our Muslim world is riven by sectarianism, factionalism, tribalism, and arrogance against our co-religionists. Violence, bigotry, and prejudice against people we consider different make a mockery of the very spirit of charity that is one of the most outstanding tenets of our religion.

A Muslim world of a billion and more people, if united in a spirit of brotherhood and common cause, peace and charity, could be one of the greatest and most

powerful forces in the world.

Disunity makes us weak. Greed and selfish short-sighted and ill-thought out political policies leave us all vulnerable to exploitation by others. In spite of our numbers and our illustrious history, Muslims are a persecuted minority in many countries.

If we look back in time, and consider the Muslim Sultanates of Bengal, the Ottomans, the Mughals, the Arab caliphs, and the Moorish kingdoms — it is evident we were

strong. There was education, rule of law, peace and prosperity. People of all faiths were allowed to practice their religions and their trades, and live in peace without religious persecution.

Today, we Muslims are different, as is evidenced by the wars and strife that we read of every day in the news. We have lost touch with our sense of brotherhood, and are destroying each other for the profit of those who have the ability to exploit disunity.

This holy month has reminded me of what the Muslim world used to be. We need to return to the fundamental enlightened tenets of our religion, remember and retrieve the virtues that made us great, and regain our identity as real Muslims.

The next time we turn to Allah to pray, we should ask for the blessings of virtue, kindness, compassion, and, most importantly, love and unity for all. We have been endowed with free will and intelligence that we may dream and work toward something greater than ourselves, to create a better world for all, and to leave behind us legacies that are significant and meaningful.

The question we must all ask ourselves is whether we have succeeded, or are even trying to do so.

Photo: LS Archive/ Sazzad Ibne Sayed

READER'S CHIT

Zakat leading to Helper's High

Have you ever experienced an intense feeling of happiness washing over you after performing an act of kindness? If yes, then you are one of those who have felt what psychologists call the Helper's High, an uplifting feeling that helps the mind, body, and spirit.

This is the month of Ramadan. Muslims perform acts of charity or give to charitable causes every year, especially during this month, in the form of Zakat — one of the five pillars of Islam. Although most of us give to charitable causes, the amount we donate are not always commensurate with



even though many of us pray five times a day, fast during Ramadan, and have performed the Hajj, we appear nonchalant when it comes to purifying our wealth by paying the obligatory Zakat.

Globally, the richest 10 percent now own 82 percent of the world's wealth, according to the 2019 Credit Suisse global wealth report. In a 2019 report from the US-based wealth research firm Wealth-X, Bangladesh was projected to see the third-fastest rise in the number of high-net-worth individuals, or in other words, ultra-rich people. The number of millionaires in the country is expected to rise by 11.4 percent by 2023. An earlier report by Wealth-X showed

that ultra-high net-worth population in Bangladesh grew at the rate of 17.3 percent between 2012 and 2017.

Therefore, what we are witnessing around the country right now only makes one thing clear — the gap between rich and poor has widened to the point where some have very "deep pockets," while others do not even have a safety net that can keep them afloat for two weeks, or in the case of disruption in income inflow.

I began this piece by writing about Helper's High, which is a different kind of a high; a high that carries you higher in life, and fulfils your self-actualisation needs.

We can be "high" on compassion and

altruism any day, every day, pandemic or not, Ramadan or not. If compassion can be practiced throughout the year, a community can thrive as a whole. At the end of the day, I cannot live or survive alone. At the end of the day, we cannot eat money! At the end of the day, we won't have food on our plates if the farmers are starving and suffering.

We all depend upon each other to survive. We all need each other to grow as a people. So, if you are in a position to help another person, you should consider yourself lucky — you need to do others good before you have your luck run out. Who knows, if you experience the Helper's High once in your life, you may get hooked on it in a very positive way!

The world is living through one of its most critical periods in recent history. Bangladesh is witnessing growing hunger, poverty, unemployment, and helplessness among its people. Ramadan is the perfect occasion to reflect upon our past actions and do what is needful at this time of crisis. Paying the annual Zakat on your wealth could be the first step to leading a more fulfilled life. Remember, Zakat is the right of the poor.

By Wara Karim

Photo: Collected



our wealth. Therefore, it is important that we calculate our due Zakat before we pay it.

I have often heard from the elderly relatives in my family say "If people paid their Zakat in full, the country would not have any poor people." We often forget the importance of this third pillar of Islam. So,