



Empowering Travelers in Islam: Significant Role of Alms-giving

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Abstract

In Islam, engagement with traveling is not merely a physical journey but a holistic endeavour encompassing various dimensions of personal and spiritual development; indeed, it is viewed as a means of intellectual enrichment rooted in the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) encouragement to seek knowledge. This research investigates the relationship between alms-giving to wayfarers (Ibn al-Sabīl) and its profound role in empowering individuals towards Human Development, employing a literature analysis approach that examines Qur'anic texts and the references of classical Islamic jurists, such as Imām Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī and Imām Al-Shāfi'ī. Through the lens of Human Development, the study's findings indicate that the provision of this financial assistance is a multifaceted practice with profound implications for individual and societal well-being. The economic empowerment engendered by alms-giving has a direct impact on meeting the basic needs of travellers to facilitate easy travel planning, in addition to indirect contributions that facilitate cultural exchanges and the fulfilment of spiritual and religious duties. Furthermore, this practice is vital in preserving human dignity by shielding recipients from the indignity of begging, subject to stringent jurisprudential eligibility criteria: the recipient must be a Muslim, an independent individual, experiencing interrupted travel (cut off from supplies), and the journey must not be intended for immoral purposes. In conclusion, the allocation of Zakat (or Zakāṭ) for Ibn al-Sabīl goes beyond mere material assistance; it aligns with the principles of humanitarianism in Islam that establish moral and social responsibility, foster compassion and empathy, and drive an inclusive, socially cohesive community.

Keywords: *Ibn al-Sabīl*, Zakat, Human Development, Alms-giving, Wayfarer, Islamic Jurisprudence

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Introduction

In Islam, travel is actively encouraged and is seen as a means to attain various spiritual and practical benefits. Because Islam places a strong emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge, the Prophet Muhammad encouraged his followers to seek it, even if it meant traveling to distant lands. This highlights the importance of travel as a fundamental means to gain wisdom and understanding within the Islamic tradition. Furthermore, traveling to historical sites holds particular significance, especially to places associated with the Prophets and pivotal events in Islamic history. Such journeys serve as an opportunity for reflection, allowing Muslims to witness firsthand the historical context of their beliefs and fostering a deeper connection to the faith's roots.

Consequently, providing assistance to *Ibn al-Sabīl* (wayfarers) is considered a fundamental act of charity and kindness that holds deep significance in the Islamic ethos, both spiritually and socially. Financially supporting travellers who find themselves in need is not only a moral obligation but also a means of attaining spiritual growth and earning rewards in the eyes of Allah. From a practical standpoint, it is understood that alms-giving to wayfarers aids in alleviating their immediate hardships and necessities. Since traveling can often be arduous and unpredictable, providing monetary assistance can significantly ease the burdens they may face. This act of generosity ensures that wayfarers have the means to procure food, shelter, and other essential provisions, ultimately contributing to their overall well-being and safety.

Moreover, offering assistance to travellers reflects the broader Islamic value of fostering a compassionate and empathetic society. It reinforces the sense of community and solidarity among Muslims, emphasizing the shared responsibility to look out for one another—especially those who are far from home or facing challenging circumstances. Ultimately, this practice builds a strong social fabric where individuals are supported in times of need, regardless of their location or situation.

Definition of Ibn al-Sabīl

The term “*Ibn al-Sabīl*” refers to those in need who are on a journey and lack the means to continue or meet their basic needs. It is worth noting that the mention of “*Ibn al-Sabīl*” in the Qur’an signifies the importance of aiding travellers, recognizing the challenges they may face away from their familiar surroundings.

Islamic scholars and jurists have expounded upon the concept of “*Ibn al-Sabīl*” in various classical texts. They emphasize that the criteria for an individual to be considered an “*Ibn al-Sabīl*” are stringent. *Imām Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī*, in his famous Qur’anic commentary *Jāmi’ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, elaborates on the derivation of the word ‘*Ibn al-Sabīl*’ and its nuances as follows:

“The *Sabīl*” means the path, or the way, and the Arabic word “*ibn*” means ‘son of’. So, the one who strikes it is said to be the son of the path, or *Ibn al-Sabīl*, because of his adherence to it. As the poet said:

أَنَا ابْنُ الْحَرْبِ رَتَّنِي وَلِيدًا ... إِلَى أَنْ شَبْتُ وَاكْتَهَلْتُ لِدَايِ

“I am the son of war. You raised me as a child...until I grew old and became mature enough to give birth.”

(Al-Ṭabarī, 2001, p. 115)

السَّبِيلُ الطَّرِيقُ، وَنُسِبَ الْمُسَافِرُ إِلَيْهَا لِمَلَا زَمَتِهِ إِيَّاهَا وَمُرُورِهِ عَلَيْهَا. كَمَا قَالَ
الشَّاعِرُ

“The Sabeel is the path, and the traveler was attributed to it because he stayed with it and passed by it; this is what the Arabs do.”

They call what is necessary for something known by it: “*Ibn*.” Thus, as a conclusion, it is clear that *Ibn al-Sabīl* defines the wayfarers eligible for Zakat in Islam. As another poet eloquently expressed:

إِنْ تَسْأَلُونِي عَنِ الْهَوَى فَأَنَا الْهَوَى ... وَأَبْنُ الْهَوَى وَأَخُو الْهَوَى وَأَبُوهُ

“If you ask me about passion, then I am passion...and the son of passion and the brother of passion and its father.”

(Al-Qurṭubī, 2006, p. 274)

The term *Ibn al-Sabīl* is extensively mentioned in various *āyāt* of the Qur'an and prophetic *hadīths*. Islam places great emphasis on hospitality and kindness towards travellers. Providing Zakat to *Ibn al-Sabīl* is a manifestation of this virtue, demonstrating a welcoming attitude towards strangers and travellers, as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad.

From a jurisprudential perspective, regarding the eighth category of Zakat recipients (the wayfarer), *Imām Al-Shāfi'ī* (may God have mercy on him) established a clear definition:

وَالصَّنْفُ الثَّامِنُ: ابْنُ السَّبِيلِ قَالَ الشَّافِعِيُّ رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ: ابْنُ السَّبِيلِ الْمُسْتَحِقُّ
لِلصَّدَقَةِ، وَهُوَ الَّذِي يُرِيدُ السَّفَرَ فِي غَيْرِ مَعْصِيَةٍ فَيَعْجِزُ عَنْ بُلُوغِ سَفَرِهِ إِلَّا
بِمَعُونَةٍ قَالَ الْأَصْحَابُ: وَمَنْ أُنْشَأَ السَّفَرَ مِنْ بَلَدِهِ لِحَاجَةٍ، جَارَ أَنْ يُدْفَعَ إِلَيْهِ
سَهْمُ ابْنِ السَّبِيلِ، فَهَذَا هُوَ الْكَلَامُ فِي شَرْحِ هَذِهِ الْأَصْنَافِ الثَّمَانِيَةِ

“The eighth category: the wayfarer. Al-Shāfi'ī, may God have mercy on him, said: The wayfarer who is deserving of charity is the one who wants to travel without committing a sin, but is unable to complete his journey except by assistance. The companions of Al-Shāfi'ī said: Whoever starts out journey from his country for a need, it is permissible for the share of a wayfarer to be paid to him.”

(Al Razi, 1981, p. 115)

Qur'an on Wayfarers

The Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, addresses various aspects of human development, including moral, spiritual, social, and intellectual growth. It provides guidance on how individuals can lead a balanced and fulfilling life, emphasizing virtues such as patience,

kindness, honesty, and justice. In the Qur'an, there are many *āyāt* that mentions *Ibn al-Sabīl* as zakat recipient and encouraging the believers to give their respective Zakat share to the eight category recipients.

In *Sūrah Al-Baqarah*, Chapter 2, *Āyah* 177, Almighty Allah said: "It is not *Al-Birr* (piety, righteousness, and every act of obedience to Allah) that you turn your faces towards east and (or) west (in prayers); but *Al-Birr* is (the quality of) the one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the Angels, the Book, the Prophets; and gives his wealth, in spite of love for it, to the kinsfolk, to the orphans, and to *Al-Masākīn* (the poor), and to the wayfarer, and to those who ask, and to set slaves free, performs *As-Salāt* (*Iqāmat as-Salāt*), and gives the *Zakāt*, and who fulfil their covenant when they make it, and who are patient in extreme poverty and ailment (disease) and at the time of fighting (during the battles). Such are the people of the truth and they are *Al-Muttaqūn*." (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1997, p. 47)

In the same chapter, it is again mentioned about wayfarers, as the believers as to prophet about in which way they need to spend their wealth, so Allah said to prophet to order them to spend their money to wayfarers, orphans, needy etc. In *Al-Baqarah*, Chapter 2, *Āyah* 215, "They ask you (O Muhammad what they should spend. Say: "Whatever you spend of good must be for parents and kindred and orphans and *Al-Masākīn* (the poor) and the wayfarers, and whatever you do of good deeds, truly, Allah knows it well." (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1997, p. 58)

Qur'an emphasizes the value of community and social responsibility. It encourages believers to care for the less fortunate, support the needy, and promote justice and equality in society. By adhering to these teachings, individuals can contribute to the overall development and well-being of their communities. There are various *āyāt* from different *sūrah* which mentions about wayfarers, which includes:

In *Sūrah An-Nisā'*, Chapter 4, *Āyah* 36, "Worship Allah and join none with Him (in worship); and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, *Al-Masākīn* (the poor), the neighbour who is near of kin, the neighbour who is a stranger, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (you meet), and those (slaves) whom your right hands possess. Verily, Allah does not like such as are proud and boastful". (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1997, p. 130)

In *Al-Anfāl*, Chapter 8, *Āyah* 41, "And know that whatever of war-booty that you may gain, verily, one-fifth (1/5th) of it is assigned to Allah, and to the Messenger, and to the near relatives [of the Messenger (Muhammad)], (and also) the orphans, *Al-Masākīn* (the poor) and the wayfarer, if you have believed in Allah and in that which We sent down to Our slave (Muhammad) on the Day of Criterion (between right and wrong), the Day when the two forces met (the battle of *Badr*); and Allah is able to do all things." (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1997, p. 261)

In *At-Tawbah*, Chapter 9, *Āyah* 60, "*Aṣ-Ṣadaqāt* (here it means Zakat) are only for the *al-Fuqarā'* (poor), and *Al-Masākīn* (the poor) and those employed to collect (the funds); and to attract the hearts of those who have been inclined (towards Islam); and to free the captives; and for those in debt; and for Allah's Cause (i.e. for *Mujāhidīn* - those fighting in a holy battle), and for the wayfarer (a traveller who is cut off from everything); a duty imposed by Allah. And Allah is All-Knower, All-Wise." (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1997, p. 403)

Empowering Travelers Through Zakat

Zakat, one of the Five Pillars of Islam, holds significant importance in the lives of Muslims worldwide. Derived from the Arabic word meaning "to purify" or "to increase," Zakat refers to the obligatory act of giving a portion of wealth to those in need. This practice plays a crucial role in fostering social justice and equality within the Islamic community. With reference to Islamic teachings, the significance of Zakat lies in its ability to cleanse one's soul, promote compassion towards the less fortunate, strengthen societal bonds, and ultimately contribute towards the establishment of a just and equitable society.

Islam advocates for the elimination of poverty and strives for the well-being of all individuals regardless of their socio-economic status. Through the indispensable act of Zakat, resources are redistributed from the affluent to the underprivileged, effectively narrowing the wealth gap. By implementing this system, Islam aims to create a society that is fair and free from socio-economic disparities. Thus, the significance of Zakat in Islam is multi-dimensional and far-reaching.

Furthermore, traveling is highly encouraged in Islam. Besides aiming to witness the historical impacts of previous nations who denied the Prophets' teachings, there are many other benefits associated with travel, such as performing Hajj or pilgrimage, earning a living, and conducting business. This has historically become a vibrant culture in Arab society. The Qur'an also encourages believers to travel the earth to reflect upon how life and the universe began. As traveling opens different doors of discovery, it serves as a profound means for individuals to acquire divine knowledge and gain a deeper understanding of their Lord.

Why Alms-giving to Wayfarers?

Giving assistance to wayfarers is consistently promoted and encouraged in Islam—mentally, physically, and financially. There is profound wisdom behind counting *Ibn al-Sabīl* as an eligible recipient of Zakat, which includes:

To Relieve Wayfarers from Their Sufferings

As traveling is a complex process, the wayfarer may navigate their journey through various circumstances and difficulties. These challenges include:

- Loss of wealth during the journey.
- Physical fatigue, discomfort, and potential health issues.
- Unfamiliar environments and unpredictable weather.
- Financial constraints: Travel expenses, including transportation, accommodation, and food, which can severely strain one's finances.
- Separation from loved ones.
- Limited resources: Access to basic necessities like clean water, food, or medical facilities may be restricted.

قَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: السَّفَرُ قِطْعَةٌ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ، يَمْنَعُ أَحَدَكُمْ طَعَامَهُ وَشَرَابَهُ وَنَوْمَهُ، فَإِذَا قَضَى حَمَّتَهُ فَلْيُعِجِّلْ إِلَى أَهْلِهِ

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Travelling is a piece of torment. It deprives one of you of his food, drink, and sleep, so when he fulfils his need, let him hasten to his family."

(Imam Bukhari, 2016, v. 2, p. 483)

Therefore, providing financial assistance to the wayfarer is considered one of the most rewarding deeds in Islam.

To Establish Compassion and Empathy among Believers

Encouraging believers to give to those in need fosters a strong sense of community and solidarity. It is essential to educate and remind individuals about the positive impact their contributions can have on improving the lives of others. Religious teachings consistently

emphasize compassion and empathy. Providing alms to travellers reflects these core values, promoting a more compassionate society and leading to spiritual rewards in the afterlife.

والله في عون العبد ما كان العبد في عون أخيه

“Allah will help a servant as long as he helps his brother.”

(Imam Muslīm, 2013, v.9, p. 22)

By extending assistance to wayfarers, Muslims strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood within the global Muslim community. This practice emphasizes a sense of unity and mutual responsibility that transcends geographical boundaries.

To Preserve Human Dignity

Providing Zakat to wayfarers in Islam is a practice deeply rooted in the principle of preserving human dignity. This act of charity serves as a powerful testament to the compassion and empathy that lie at the heart of Islamic teachings. When individuals find themselves on a journey, away from the familiarity and security of their homes, they are often in a state of vulnerability. In such circumstances, their sense of dignity and self-worth can be easily compromised as they may face challenges in meeting basic needs like food, water, shelter, and transportation. This is where Zakat steps in as a safeguard against the erosion of their dignity.

By extending financial assistance to wayfarers, Islam aims to shield them from the indignity of having to beg or rely on the goodwill of strangers. Begging, in many cultures, is accompanied by a sense of shame and can lead to a loss of self-respect. By providing Zakat, the Muslim community ensures that those in need can maintain their dignity, upholding their sense of self-worth and pride. Furthermore, Zakat helps to prevent individuals from compromising their integrity in order to meet their immediate needs. Desperation can drive people to engage in activities that may be ethically questionable. By offering financial support, Zakat acts as a buffer against such situations, allowing individuals to maintain their moral standards.

Preserving human dignity through Zakat is a manifestation of the broader Islamic value of respecting the innate worthiness of every individual. It reflects the belief that every human being, regardless of their circumstances, possesses inherent dignity that should be upheld and protected. This practice also underscores the communal responsibility that Muslims bear towards one another, exemplifying the unity and mutual support that defines the community. In essence, providing Zakat to wayfarers is a powerful affirmation of the intrinsic worth of every human being. It stands as a testament to the Islamic belief that no one should be left to suffer the indignity of begging or compromising their integrity due to circumstances beyond their control.

Impacts of Alms-giving to Wayfarers

Easy Travel Planning and Execution

Travel planning is essential for a well-organized, enjoyable, and stress-free trip, as it helps individuals make informed decisions. It involves several key requirements to ensure a smooth and successful journey. Financial assistance can play a crucial role in meeting these requirements. Here are the essential elements for travel planning and how financial aid can be beneficial:

- **Destination and Purpose:** Determine the destination and purpose of the trip. This includes considering factors like cultural, educational, or business-related objectives.
- **Accommodation:** Arrange for suitable accommodation, which may range from hotels and hostels to private rentals or staying with friends or family.
- **Transportation:** Arrange for reliable transportation, whether it is by plane, train, bus, or car. This includes booking tickets, reserving seats, and ensuring the necessary travel documents like passports and visas are obtained.
- **Financial Considerations:** Estimate the overall cost of the trip, including accommodation, transportation, food, activities, and contingencies for unexpected expenses.
- **Health Precautions:** Check if any vaccinations or health precautions are required or recommended for the destination.

Consequently, financial assistance plays a vital role in enabling individuals to plan and undertake their journeys with confidence and security. This ultimately enhances the overall travel experience through various measures, such as covering travel expenses—including accommodation, transportation, food, and activities. It provides a safety net for unexpected emergencies, such as medical expenses and travel disruptions. Furthermore, financial aid can open up opportunities for travel that might not have been feasible otherwise, particularly for individuals or families facing economic difficulties.

Fulfilling Religious Duties

Supporting religious pilgrimages or missions allows travellers to fulfil their religious duties. It also purifies the receivers because it saves them from the humiliation of begging and prevents them from envying the rich. Providing Zakat to wayfarers is viewed as an act of worship in Islam. It is believed to purify the giver's wealth and soul, earning them immense blessings and rewards from Allah. This act contributes to the spiritual growth and development of the individual. By providing for the needs of wayfarers, Muslims fulfil this obligation, earning spiritual rewards and strengthening their relationship with their Creator.

In addition, financial aid enables travellers to engage in cultural activities and events, preserving and promoting local culture. Travelers can engage in cultural exchange in various ways, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation for different cultures. Ultimately, this facilitates systematic cultural exchanges.

Satisfying Economic Needs

Through travel, there is also a significant effect on the local economy. Wayfarers spending money locally contributes to the economic activity of the destination. By aiding wayfarers, this leads to the development of the local economy through expenditures on accommodation, food, and other travel needs from various local places. Providing financial support empowers travellers, especially those facing economic difficulties. Travelers are a community that must be aided because of the myriad of sufferings and difficulties they may face. Therefore, by empowering these individuals, it leads to the overall development of the traveling community. As seen in the modern generation, a growing number of travellers are journeying across the world for diverse purposes such as pilgrimage, higher education, and business.

Eligibility Criteria

The jurists of Islamic jurisprudence have established specific conditions to qualify an *Ibn al-Sabīl* to receive Zakat, namely:

1. Islam: The recipient must be a Muslim.
2. Independent: The recipient must be a free individual.
3. Not a descendant of *Banū* or *Banī Hāshim*: This condition is specifically stated in the *Mālikī* sect.
4. Foreigner or Traveller: This condition is unanimously agreed upon by the jurists. However, Shafi'i jurists hold that an *Ibn al-Sabīl* can also consist of the original inhabitants of a place, a person who lives there, or anyone who wants to travel from a certain Zakat collection area. In this context, *Imām Al-Shāfi'ī* often uses the term "property neighbourhood charity."
5. Interrupted Travel: The traveller must be facing difficulties as a result of their journey being interrupted or having inadequate supplies to meet their needs. While this is agreed upon by most jurists, Shafi'i jurists added that individuals who reside in a place and intend to start a journey but lack sufficient property are also eligible to receive Zakat.
6. Lawful Intent: The trip must not be intended for immoral purposes. Instead, the travel should involve matters that are required, permissible, or mandatory in religion (Abd Khafidz & Mohd Subri, 2012).

In the distribution of Zakat, if a traveller does not require financial assistance, then Zakat does not need to be given to him. For instance, a traveller whose trip is interrupted may still want to continue his journey or settle in a foreign country, but he might be able to do so by riding with traders or using other people's vehicles without spending any money. The fundamental basis for distributing Zakat to general recipients is their need for financial or material aid. However, the basis for distributing Zakat to an *Ibn al-Sabīl* is specifically because they are cut off from the supply of property needed to reach their destination and require financial or material assistance to fulfil this objective. Therefore, only individuals who genuinely need financial help are eligible to receive the Zakat allocation designated for *Ibn al-Sabīl*.

Conclusion

In this exploration of the significance of *Ibn al-Sabīl* as a Zakat recipient in human development, we have delved into the multifaceted impact of this charitable practice on the well-being and growth of travellers in Islam. The findings of this research shed light on the profound implications of providing support to those in transit, underscoring its importance in fostering a more inclusive and compassionate society.

Through the lens of human development, it is evident that Zakat directed towards *Ibn al-Sabīl* goes beyond mere financial assistance. It symbolizes a commitment to upholding the dignity and safety of travellers, ensuring that they can navigate their journeys with resilience and confidence. This act of kindness also serves as a powerful catalyst for social cohesion, bridging the gap between communities and affirming the universal brotherhood of humanity. Ultimately, assisting travellers in Islam promotes empathy, compassion, and community support. It aligns with the core principles of charity and cultivates a harmonious society by encouraging generosity, which in turn leads to the personal growth and spiritual development of individuals.

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