46209 - Categories of Zakah Recipients

the question

What are the categories on which zakah must be spent?

Summary of answer

There are 8 categories of Zakah recipients:
1. The poor
2. The needy
3. Those employed to collect or administer
4. To attract the hearts of those who have been inclined towards Islam
5. The slaves
6. Those who are in debt
7. For Allah’s Cause
8. The wayfarers

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Reference to Zakah recipients in the Quran

There are eight categories on which zakah must be spent, which Allah has explained clearly. He states that this is a duty imposed by Allah and that it is based on knowledge and wisdom. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“As-Sadaqat (here it means zakah) are only for the Fuqara (poor), and Al-Masakin (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

Mujahidun — those fighting in a just 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-Tawbah 9:60]

Categories of Zakah recipients

These eight are the categories who are entitled to zakah and to whom it must be paid.

- The first and second are the fuqara and masakin (the poor and needy) . They should be given zakah to meet their needs. The difference between the fuqara and masakin is that the fuqara are in greater need; one of them cannot find enough to suffice himself and his dependents for half a year. The masakin are better off than the fuqara, because they can find half of what will suffice them or more. These people should be given zakah because of their need.

How to calculate the need of the poor and the needy

The scholars said: They should be given what they need to suffice them and their families for one year, because when the year has passed, zakah will become due again. Just as the year is the unit of time by which zakah becomes due, so too the year should be the unit of time by which the poor and needy, who are entitled to zakah, should be given zakah. This is a good view, i.e., we should give the poor and needy person what will suffice him and his family for a full year, whether we give it in the form of food and clothing, or we give him money with which to buy what suits him, or we give him tools with which he can make things, if he is good at that, such as a tailor, carpenter or blacksmith and so on. What matters is that we give him what will suffice him and his family for one year.

- The third is: those employed to collect or administer (the funds), i.e., those who are appointed by the authorities. This refers to those who are involved in the collection and distribution of zakah. They are the collectors who collect it from those who have to pay it, and the ones who divide it among those who are entitled to it, and those who record it, and so on. All of these are those employed to collect [or administer] (the funds) who may be given some of the zakah.

How much should zakah collectors be given?

Those who are employed to administer the zakah deserve to be paid from it in return for their work, and they should be given according to their efforts.

Based on this, they should be given zakah commensurate with their work, whether they are rich or poor, because they are receiving zakah for their work, not because of their need. Based on this, they should be given of the zakah what they deserve for their work.

If it so happens that those who are employed to administer the zakah are poor, they may be given zakah for their work, and be given whatever will suffice them for one year because of their being poor. They are entitled to zakah on two counts – because of their work in administering it and because of their poverty, so they should be given zakah for both reasons.

But if we give them zakah for their work and that will not meet their needs for one year, then we should give them more so that they have enough for one year.

An example of that is if we assume that ten thousand riyals will suffice them for one year and if we give them zakah because of their being poor they will receive ten thousand riyals. If their share because of their work is two thousand riyals, then we should give them two thousand riyals for their work, and give them eight thousand riyals because of their being poor.

- The fourth is: "to attract the hearts of those who have been inclined (towards Islam)". These are people who may be given zakah in order to open their hearts towards Islam, either a kafir who we hope will become Muslim, or a Muslim to whom we give in order to strengthen his faith, or an evil man to whom we give zakah so as to ward off his evil from the Muslims, and other cases in which it is in the Muslims' interests to attract their hearts.

But is it necessary that he should be a leader who is obeyed among his people, so that attracting his heart will serve a greater interest, or is it permissible to give to attract individual's hearts, such as a man who has recently entered Islam and needs something to attract his heart and strengthen his faith?

This is an issue concerning which the scholars differed. The most correct view in my opinion is that there is nothing wrong with giving zakah to attract a person to Islam and strengthen his faith, even if that is on an individual level and he is not a leader among his people, because of the general meaning of the words “to attract the hearts of those who have been inclined (towards Islam)”, and because if it is permissible to give to the poor because of his physical needs, then it is more appropriate that we should give to this one who is weak in faith in order to strengthen his faith, because strengthening a person’s faith is more important than nourishing his body.

These four may be given zakah on the basis of ownership; they may be given full ownership that is not altered if they cease to fall into these categories during the year. They will not be required to return the zakah and it will remain permissible for them, because Allah described them as being entitled to it and says “As-Sadaqat (here it means zakah) are only for the Fuqara (poor), and Al-Masakin (the poor) and those employed to collect (the funds); and to attract the hearts of those who have been inclined (towards Islam)”. He used the word li (innama al-sadaqat li’l-fuqar [As-Sadaqaat (here it means zakah) are only for the Fuqara (poor)]…).

What this means is that even if the poor person becomes independent of means during the year, he is not obliged to return the zakah, such as if we were to give him ten thousand because he is poor and that will suffice him for one year, then Allah made him independent of means during that year by causing him to earn money, or by causing him to inherit from a relative who dies, and so on, he does not have to return whatever is left of the zakah money that he took, because it now belongs to him.

- The fifth category of those who are entitled to zakah is: slaves. The scholars explained this in three ways:

1. A mukatib or slave who has entered into a contract of manumission to buy himself from his master for a sum to be paid later. He may be given enough money to fulfil this contract with his master.
2. A slave who may be bought with zakah funds and set free
3. A Muslim prisoner who has been captured by the kuffar; the kuffar may be given zakah funds

to ransom this prisoner. This also applies to kidnapping: if a kafir or Muslim has kidnapped a Muslim, there is nothing wrong with ransoming this person with zakah funds, because the purpose is the same, namely releasing a Muslim from captivity. This applies if we are not able to force the kidnapper to release him without using this money, if the victim is a Muslim.

- The sixth is: those who are in debt . The scholars divided debt into two categories: debts incurred to bring about reconciliation, and debts incurred because of need. With regard to debts incurred to bring about reconciliation, they gave the example of a case where there is a dispute, conflict or war between two tribes, and a man of good will, standing and honour comes and reconciles between these two tribes, incurring expenses for which he takes responsibility. So we should give this man money from zakah, in appreciation of his great effort which has put an end to enmity and hostility and bloodshed among believers. He should be given zakah regardless of whether he is rich or poor, because we are not giving it because he is in need, rather we are giving it because he has brought about reconciliation, which serves the common interest.
- The second category of debtors is the one who is in debt on his own account, who took a loan either to meet his own needs or purchase something that he needs, and he did not have money. His debt may be paid off from zakah funds so long as he does not have any wealth that could be used to pay off the debt.

The question here is: is it better for us to give the zakah wealth to the debtor to pay off his debt, or to go to his lender and pay it off on his behalf?

It depends. If the debtor is keen to pay off his debt, and he can be trusted to use what he is given to pay off the debt, then we give it to him so that he may pay off his debt himself, because this is more concealing and is less likely to embarrass him in front of the people who are asking him to pay off the debt.

But if he is a careless man who wastes money, and if we give him money to pay off his debt he will go and buy things that he does not need, then we should not give it to him, rather we should go to the lender and say to him: How much does So and So owe you?” then we should give him the

money or some of it, depending on what we can afford.

- The seventh is: “for Allah’s Cause”. What is meant here is jihad for the sake of Allah and nothing else. It is not correct to say that it means all kinds of goodness or charity, because if what is meant was all kinds of goodness or charity, there would be no point in Allah limiting it and saying (interpretation of the meaning):

“As-Sadaqat (here it means zakah) are only for the Fuqara (poor), and Al-Masakin (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 Mujahidun — those fighting in a just 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-Tawbah 9:60]

In that case, this limitation (innama, translated here as “only”) would have no meaning. What is meant by “for Allah’s Cause” is jihad for the sake of Allah. Zakah should be given to those who are fighting for the sake of Allah, who are evidently fighting so that the word of Allah will be supreme. They should be given whatever they need of zakah in the form of money, weapons and so on. It is permissible to buy weapons for them from the zakah funds so that they may use them for fighting, but it is essential that the fighting be for the sake of Allah.

Fighting for the sake of Allah was explained by the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) when he was asked about a man who fought for his tribe, or because he is brave, or to show off: which of them was fighting for the sake of Allah? He said: “The one who fights so that the word of Allah may be supreme is the one who is fighting for the sake of Allah.” The man who fights for tribal or nationalistic reasons is not fighting for the sake of Allah and does not deserve what the one who fights for the sake of Allah deserves, whether that is material things in this world or reward in the Hereafter. The man who fights for the sake of courage, because he loves to fight because is brave – and the one who has a characteristic usually loves to do that no matter what the situation – is not fighting for the sake of Allah either. The one who fights to show off is fighting to earn a reputation, and he is not fighting for the sake of Allah. None of them are fighting for the sake of Allah, so they are not entitled to zakah, because Allah says “and for Allah’s Cause”. The

one who is fighting for Allah’s Cause is the one who is fighting so that word of Allah will be supreme.

The scholars said: “for Allah's cause” includes a man who devotes his time to seeking Islamic knowledge. He may be given zakah for whatever he needs of maintenance, clothing, food, drink, accommodation and books of knowledge that he needs, because Islamic knowledge is a kind of jihad for the sake of Allah. Imam Ahmad (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “There is nothing equivalent to knowledge for one who has the right intention.” Knowledge is the basis of all shari’ah, and there is no shari’ah except with knowledge. Allah revealed the Book so that people would establish justice and learn the rulings of their religion and what they are required to believe, say and do. With regard to jihad for the sake of Allah, it is one of the noblest of deeds, and it is the pinnacle of Islam, and there is no doubt concerning its virtue, but knowledge is extremely important in Islam, and there is no doubt that it may be included under the heading of jihad.

- The eighth is: wayfarers, i.e., travellers who are cut off from everything and have no money. Such a traveller may be given enough zakah to enable him to reach his homeland, even if he is rich in his own country, because he is in need. In this case, we do not say that the traveller has to borrow money and pay it back, because in this case we would be imposing a debt on him. But if he chooses to borrow and pay it back, and not take the zakah, then it is up to him. If we find a person who is travelling from Makkah to Madinah, and he loses his money (and supplies) and does not have anything, but he is rich in Madinah, then we should give him just enough to help him reach Madinah, because this is what he needs, and we should not give him any more than that.

Now that we know the eight categories to whom zakah may be given, zakah should not be spent on other interests, whether public or private. Based on this, we should not use zakah to build mosques, repair roads, build libraries and so on, because when Allah mentioned the categories of those to whom zakah may be given, He said (interpretation of the meaning): “a duty imposed by Allah. And Allah is All-Knower, All-Wise” i.e., these categories have come as an obligation from Allah. “And Allah is All-Knower, All-Wise.”

Must zakah be given to each of zakah recipients?

Then we say: must zakah be given to each of these categories, because the word wa (and) implies all?

The answer is that this is not obligatory, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said to Mu'adh ibn Jabal (may Allah be pleased with him), when he sent him to Yemen: “Teach them that Allah has enjoined on them charity (zakah) from their wealth, to be taken from their rich and given to their poor.” The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) mentioned only one category, which indicates that in this verse Allah explained those on whom zakah may be spent, but it does not mean that zakah must be given to all of them at the same time.

Which of zakah recipients should be given priority?

If it is said: which of these categories should be given priority with regard to zakah? We say: Priority should be given where the need is greatest, because all of them are entitled, so whoever is in greater need should be given priority. Usually the ones who are in greatest need are the poor and needy, hence Allah started with them and said (interpretation of the meaning):

“As-Sadaqat (here it means zakah) are only for the Fuqara (poor), and Al-Masakin (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 Mujahidun — those fighting in a just 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-Tawbah 9:60]

For more, please see this category: Zakah

And Allah knows best.

Reference:

Majmu’ Fatawa Ibn ‘Uthaymin (18/331-339).