**Altruism or Religious Obligation?**

**Religiously motivated giving is nurtured through values that work toward fortifying the enduring philanthropic spirit.**

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The call to prayer (Azaan) fills the neighborhood. You rush to your vehicle amidst the chirping of the birds and whistling of the wind on a dimly sunny Friday, hoping to make it just in time for the congregational Jummah prayers. Stopping at a red signal, you look outside the window, and your eyes meet an old, worn-out, lonely woman in her late sixties, sitting candidly on the green belt. Holding loosely in one hand a variety of dusting cloths hemmed at the borders, she perches up her cheek with the other, eyes wandering to trace potential customers. Motivated by the spirit of Ramadan, you steer the wheel to move towards her, roll down your window, and reach out to hand her a hundred rupee note. Her eyes twinkle, and with a sudden movement, she raises her arms above her as if they’ll reach the highest skies and says, “Allah tawadii jamnay aali maa da kalaija thanda rakhay haur tawadday bachun nu salamat rakhay” (May Allah keep your mother’s heart at peace and your children safe). Your lips curve up in a smile, and the hand with which you gave rushes to your bosom to rest on your heart as you proclaim, “Ameen!”. You think to yourself, it feels incredible to give “Fisabillilah” (For Allah’s Sake).

[May-9 culprits deserve severe punishment: Hamza](https://www.nation.com.pk/10-May-2024/may-9-culprits-deserve-severe-punishment-hamza)

How many of us have given a share of our wealth and time to those in need for the sake of our respective religions? If you are a Pakistani, the odds for this are very high. A recent survey by the Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy unveils that approximately 90% of giving, be it in cash, kind, or volunteering, is religiously motivated. This applies to an eclectic variety of religious groups and sects present in Pakistan. Therefore, a common thread of philanthropy weaves together all fractions, be it Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Christian, and communities belonging to other religions. The coming together of these communities augments and enhances a culture of giving in Pakistan, making our country one of the most charitable regions. While we boastfully enjoy the title, we know little of the origins of giving that can be traced back to the historical subcontinent that had been a patchwork of different religions. Therefore, philanthropy has infused our collective culture by their virtue, making giving instinctive.

[Police, other departments to act in unison to protect women: Minster](https://www.nation.com.pk/10-May-2024/police-other-departments-to-act-in-unison-to-protect-women-minster)

However, since religion is deeply intertwined with the idea of giving, it must be disentangled to understand the difference between religious giving and religiously motivated giving so that we may not undervalue the role that religiously motivated giving plays in the socio-economic development of our society. Religious Giving is influenced by the belief that God requires worship through monetary contributions to religious leaders to create religious institutions/places of worship and for pilgrimage. Undoubtedly, this may not add immediate value to society’s socio-economic enhancement.

On the contrary, religiously motivated giving is nurtured through values that work toward fortifying the enduring philanthropic spirit. This type of giving revolves around acts of charity that alleviate poverty, make education accessible, provide healthcare, and all other goods and services that any individual lacks yet are necessary for them to progress socially and economically- all to gain God’s favor. With this echoes a reiteration: unearth the deific presence within the hearts of the destitute, and should you seek to worship God, let it be through sacred acts of charity. Take, for instance, the example of Hinduism that comprises sixteen Maha Daan, i.e., sixteen different ways of giving. It includes Jalaashay (donation of wells, ponds, reservoirs), Dvari Bandh (creating dams for villages/fields), Araam (planting trees, orchards, and gardens for public use), Ashraya (building rest houses and shelters) and Arogya (taking care of the sick). Based on this example, the distinction between religious giving and religiously motivated giving can be navigated by drawing close attention to the receiving purpose of the charity, which in this case is to provide a social safety net. Therefore, it can be categorized as religiously motivated giving.

[Azma terms May 9 darkest day in country’s history](https://www.nation.com.pk/10-May-2024/azma-terms-may-9-darkest-day-in-country-s-history)

The traditions of giving in Sikhism further provide insights into this distinction. In Sikhism, Langar, an exceptionally known act of service (Seva), is based on the philosophy that a poor man’s mouth is like the Guru’s Golak (coin repository). Therefore, any relief or food provided to the lonely is equivalent to the worship of the Guru himself. While religion serves as a motivating factor, this act of giving serves the needs of the poor and desolate; hence, it is religiously motivated.

In the context of Islam, we correlate Zakat, a compulsory component of giving in Islam, with religious giving even though, depending upon the receiving purpose, it may be religiously motivated giving. Whether you give your Zakat to institutions such as TCF, Akhuwat, and Shaukat Khanum or to individuals you know personally for their socio-economic welfare, this religiously motivated giving enables you to play your part in weaving a tighter yet broader social safety net.

[Yemen’s Houthis claim they targeted 112 Israeli, US, UK ships amid Gaza conflict](https://www.nation.com.pk/10-May-2024/yemen-s-houthis-claim-they-targeted-112-israeli-us-uk-ships-amid-gaza-conflict)

Contrary to popular belief, several religious institutions are also significantly driven by religiously motivated philanthropy; thus, giving to these institutions may only sometimes count as religious giving. For example, several Muslims donate in significant amounts to Mazars (religious institutions) headed by Peers, which, when accumulated, serve as a source of funding for the food and shelter for the ostracized in Pakistan’s society. Another example from Christianity further explicates this perspective. In Christianity, tithing is a religious tax (10% of their income) collected by the Church, which directs this money to the community’s social welfare. This is often seen through subsidized education provided to Christian students from a low-income household to ensure greater equity.

As we delve deeper into understanding these forms of giving, we are left in awe of the intent of relief and the collective potential these teachings have in alleviating darkness from the corners of our society. One has no choice but to ponder how, if this giving is institutionalized, a vast portion of the population can benefit from support from those whose giving is motivated by their respective religions. In essence, these examples leave us with one central insight: while all religious giving is religiously motivated, not all religiously motivated giving is religious giving.

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