

Az-Zakāh:

Definition, rulings, who pays it

1. Its Definition

Az-Zakāh literally means “growth” and “purification.” Technically, it refers to a portion of certain wealth given by a believer per annum to the poor and others.

2. Its History

Az-Zakāh was institutionalized, making it compulsory on believers with conditions, within the first seven years of the Hijrah (1-7 AH), according to the majority of scholars. Others claim that it was institutionalized in Islam before the Hijrah.

3. Its Ruling (*ḥukm*)

Scholars unanimously agree that *Zakāh* is compulsory (*farḍ*), a pillar (*rukṅ*) of Islam, and a religious necessity (*ḍarūra*). The proofs of it are in the Qur’an and Ḥadīth, as follows.

The Qur’an states, “**Take from their wealth ṣadaqa (i.e. Zakāh)**” (Q.9:103) and “**Pay Zakāh**” (Q.2:43).

The Prophet ﷺ said that Islam is built on five pillars, one of which is *Zakāh* (Reported by al-Bukhāri & Muslim).

Scholars further agreed that to deny *Zakāh* or refuse to pay it intentionally leads to *kufr* (“disbelief”).

4. Who Pays *Zakāh*?

Zakāh is compulsory on every male and female believer who is Muslim, adult, sane, and meets its conditions (which will be discussed later in this series, *inshā Allah*).

Some scholars have subjected the wealth of the insane, minor, or orphan that has not yet reached the age of puberty under *Zakāh*.

The preferred learned opinion, in our view, is that those categories are excluded from the obligation of *Zakāh* proper. According to ash-Shawkāni (d.1251 AH/1835 CE), “It is not right that the *āyah* ‘**Take from their wealth ṣadaqa [Zakāh]**’ (Q.9:103) be applied to other than *mukallifīn* (i.e. adult, sane Muslim who meet its conditions). Thus, the rest of the *āyah* ‘**in order to purify them and cleanse them by it**’ does not fit minors or the insane, since they are, by virtue of their statuses, already exempt from Islamic Law (*Sharia*).

5. Divine Incentives to Pay *Zakāh*

Allah says, “**Establish prayer (Ṣalāh), pay Zakāh, and lend Allah a goodly loan (qarḍ ḥasan). Whatever good deed you have sent forth (to benefit) your souls (in the Hereafter), you will find it with Allah. It is better for you**

and is the greater reward” (Q.73:20).

The Prophet ﷺ said that Islam is built on five pillars, one of which is *Zakāh* (Reported by al-Bukhāri & Muslim).

A man came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, “O Messenger of Allah, inform me of a deed that will cause me to enter Paradise (*Janna*) and keep me far away from the Fire (*al-Nār*)?” The Prophet ﷺ replied, “*Worship Allah and do not ascribe partners, establish Ṣalāh, and pay Zakāh, and maintain family ties*” (Reported by al-Bukhāri).

6. Divine Warnings for Neglecting

Zakāh Allah says, “**On the Day when that gold and silver, which was not paid (as Zakāh), will be heated in the Fire of Hell and with it will be branded their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs; (and it will be said unto them :) ‘This is the treasure which you hoarded for yourselves. Now taste of what you used to hoard’**” (Q.9:35).