

Muslim Philanthropy in a Canadian Context

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Abstract

Two recurring themes of the Qur'ān are ṣalāt and zakāt. Ṣalāt, ritual prayer, symbolizes the vertical relationship of humans to God while zakāt, general charity, symbolizes horizontal interpersonal relationships. The horizontal human-to-human relationship places the tradition of charity at the center of a Muslim's personal and communal life. This paper focuses on charitable activities as they pertain to the Shī'a Ithnā-'Ashari Muslim community of Canada. It took Canadian Muslims (including the Shī'a Muslims) some time to plant their roots as a community in this new land but once they were settled, the human and Islamic impulse moved them to contribute to the well-being of society at large. The sense of gratitude toward Canada and the spirit of charitable giving ingrained in their Islamic values encouraged the Shī'a Muslims to help not only their fellow Muslims but also the less fortunate members of society regardless of race or religion. Although humanitarian causes in third world countries have strong appeal among the children and grandchildren of Muslim immigrants and they indeed give in big numbers, they have not been oblivious to the local needs of society. Using the concept of ṣadaqah, rather than the technical zakat, which is limited in its application among Shī'a Muslims in Canada, the community has participated in various charitable causes beyond the bounds of its own religious members.

Keywords: zakāt; ṣadaqah; fiṭrah; fidyah

Introduction

The concept of philanthropy in Islam is symbolized by the term “zakāt,” which occurs 32 times in the Qur'ān; 27 of those are paired with “ṣalāt.” In these two recurring themes of the Qur'ān, ṣalāt, the ritual prayer, symbolizes the vertical relationship of humans to God while zakāt, general charity, symbolizes horizontal human-to-human relationships.¹

¹ Out of the 32 occurrences of “zakāt” in the Qur'ān, seven verses were revealed in Mecca, whereas zakāt as an obligatory wealth tax was only introduced in a later part of the Prophet's life

Wealth is a trust given to us by God for our use as well as for sharing it with less fortunate members of society: “And in their wealth is a right for the beggar and the deprived.” (Qur’ān 51:19, 17:25). In historical Muslim states, the government administered the distribution of wealth under a *zakāt* department or public treasury (*baytul māl*). This is clearly reflected in the phrase “those who work on it” (*‘āmilūn ‘alayhā*), referring to those who collected and administered the distribution of *zakāt* and other religious dues (Qur’ān 9:60). However, the implementation of this system was not uniform in Muslim empires. During the early Muslim caliphates, it was administered by the government, as seen, for example, in the standard instructions given to “*zakāt* collectors” by Imām ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib in *Nahj al-Balāghah*.² However, by the fifth century, the role of governments in administering religious dues had greatly diminished.³

Even when Muslims lived outside the jurisdiction of a Muslim state or as a minority, the concept of *zakāt* in its general sense has been practiced either individually or collectively. This is best reflected in the minor *zakāt* known as *zakat al-fīṭr* or simply *fīṭrah*, which is obligatory on ‘Īd al-Fiṭr, the celebration feast at the end of Ramaḍān, and is mostly administered through mosques and Islamic centers and organizations even in the West.

In Shī‘ī jurisprudence, *zakāt* is obligatory on nine items in three categories: (a) gold and silver coins; (b) cows, sheep/goats, and camels; and (c) wheat, barley, dates, and raisins.⁴ *Zakāt* in gold and silver is only applicable if it is in the form of coins in circulation, and therefore Shī‘a jurists do not apply *zakāt* to banknotes.⁵ Therefore, the scope of *zakāt*, especially for Shī‘as in the West, is limited.

in Medina. See Bearman et al. (2022, p. 407). Even in the occurrences of “*zakāt*” in Medinan verses, 11 refer to general charity and only 16 refer to the obligatory wealth tax as understood in jargon of jurisprudence (*‘urf al-mutasharri‘ah*). See Al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, (vol. 6, pp. 10–11).

² See letters nos. 25, 26, and 51 in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, a compilation of Imam ‘Alī’s sermons, letters, and sayings by Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1015). Under letter 25, the compiler says, “Amīr al-Mu‘minīn used to write to whoever he appointed for the collection of *zakāt* and charities”; under letter 26, he says, “Given to one of his officers whom he sent for the collection of *zakāt* and charities”; under letter 51, he says, “To his collectors of (land) tax.” Interestingly, letter no. 41 is stern rebuke to an officer who had mismanaged public funds and usurped them for personal gains.

³ See Bearman et al. (2022, pp. 409–410): “By about 493/1100, governmental collection of *zakāt* across the Muslim world had become largely a thing of the past and has remained so ever since for the great majority of Muslims.”

⁴ See al-Mufīd (d. 413 AH), (1413, p. 235); al-Ṭūsī (d. 460 AH) (1400, p. 175); M. al-Ḥilli (d. 676 AH) (1408, p. 139) on the early eras to the contemporary jurists like al-Yazdī (1409, p. 286); al-Khū‘ī (1395, p. 308); al-Sistānī (2017, p. 334).

⁵ For a discussion on why paper currencies cannot be considered the same as gold and silver coins, see the transcript of Shaykh Ḥusayn al-Ḥilli’s lectures by ‘Izzu al-Dīn Baḥr al-‘Ulūm (1433, pp. 76–78). (Among the Sunni schools of jurisprudence, the Ḥanbali school does not apply *zakāt* on paper currencies unless one converts them into gold or silver [Mughniyyah, 2008, pp. 277–278].) In contemporary times, when General Zia-ul-Haq enacted the Pakistani *Zakat and Ushr Ordinance of 1980*, the Pakistani Shī‘as protested against it, which led to an amendment exempting them if they file a declaration that their *fiqh* do not oblige them to comply in whole or in part with the ordinance.

Although the implementation of obligatory zakāt in Shī‘ī jurisprudence is limited, nonetheless the overall tradition of philanthropy continues in full force in the forms of *ṣadaqah*, *fiṭrah*, *fidyah*, *kaffārah*, and *khumus*. *Ṣadaqah* means a general donation, *fidyah* refers to charity in the form of grain given in lieu of missing the fasts of Ramaḍān due to medical reasons, and *kaffārah* is similar to *fidya* but refers to the penalty for missing the fasts without an excuse. *Khumus* or *khums* will be explained below.

In this paper, I have briefly surveyed the tradition of philanthropy among the Shī‘a Ithnā-‘Ashari Muslims in Canada, within the community as well as within society at large. As far as I know, there has been no study on the philanthropical activities of Shī‘a Ithnā-‘Ashari Muslims in Canada and so it is hoped that this paper will highlight the integration of a Muslim minority within society at large from the lens of charity.

Muslim Philanthropy within the Community

Ṣadaqah and *fiṭrah* is disbursed by the Shī‘as mostly individually or through a local imam or the mosque administration. However, when it comes to *khums* (one-fifth or 20% of the annual profits from a business or savings of a person), this is obligatory. Shī‘as have to annually calculate how much they have saved or the net profits of their business, and then 20% of that has to be paid as *khums*. Half of *khums* is known as “*sihm al-sādah*” (the share of the *sādāt*) and is used for the poor and needy *sayyid* (pl. *sādāt*), i.e., the descendants of the Prophet from Fāṭimah and ‘Alī. The *sādāt* are commonly known in Sunni Arab circles as *sharīf*, pl. *ashrāf*. The *sihm al-sādah* is dedicated to the *sādāt* since they are barred from using *zakāt* and *ṣadaqah* in the Shī‘ī as well as Sunni schools of jurisprudence (Mughniyyah, 2008, pp. 287–288).

The other half of *khums* is known as *sihm al-Imām* (the share of the Imām), i.e., the Twelfth Imām of the Shī‘a Ithnā-‘Ashari Muslims. However, since he is in the state of Occultation, the *sihm al-Imām*, according to contemporary jurists, has to be given to the senior most Shī‘a jurist (*mujtahid*) or utilized with his permission for religious and charitable causes.⁶ (The senior most Shi‘a jurist or *mujtahid* who is approached for religious verdicts is commonly known as *marja’*.)

Shī‘a Ithnā-‘Asharī communities in the West rely on the *sihm al-Imām* portion of the *khums* for building and maintaining their religious centers and faith-based full-time schools, for propagation of the faith, and also for the relief of poverty among community members. This is done by seeking authorization from the living *marja’* (the senior most jurist) for the utilization of the *sihm al-Imām* portion of *khums*. Depending on the circumstances, the *marja’* would allow up to half of the *sihm al-Imām* to be used locally for appropriate causes and what is left would be sent to him for maintaining the major religious seminaries, such as the

⁶ For more details, see Rizvi (2014).

one in Najaf (Iraq) and Qum (Iran), as well as secondary level seminaries in Lebanon, Bahrain, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.

Although the majority of Shī‘a centers in Canada are not entirely funded by the *sihm al-Imām*, there is no doubt that a considerable amount of *sihm al-Imām* has been contributed toward these buildings. Moreover, when an organization gains permission from the *marja‘* to utilize a portion of *sihm al-Imām* for its project, that authorization itself lends credibility and builds on the confidence among community members to donate even more from their personal funds

By looking at the model of the Islamic Shī‘a Ithnā-‘Ashari Jamaat of Toronto (one of the largest and most organized Shī‘a communities in North America), I can confidently say that *ṣadaqah*, *fiṭrah*, and *sihm al-Imām* are also used for helping members of the community who are in need. This is done either by providing funds, monthly food rations or vouchers, or rent assistance payments for less fortunate community members. These funds are also used to help those postsecondary students who cannot afford their college or university fees. Interestingly, the most senior jurist of our time, the Grand Āyatullāh S. ‘Ali al-Sistānī, is of the opinion that *fiṭrah* should not be sent out to other cities or countries if there are needy Shī‘as in your locality (As-Sistānī, 2017, p. 355).

Adjusting to new environments and new challenges, the Islamic Shī‘a Ithnā-‘Ashari Jamaat of Toronto (ISIJ) has been a pioneer in expanding its scope of charitable activities within the community by establishing “Jaffari Social Services” and hiring two part-time psychologists to assess the needs of applicants, provide them with a variety of services such as counseling, and guide them to the resources available to them by local government agencies. Besides the ISIJ, there are other Shī‘a organizations that are not center-based but provide support to deserving Shī‘as for their basic needs and deserving Shī‘a students for higher education: NASIMCO, Salaam Foundation, Al-Ma‘ārif Foundation, Al-Ayn Social Care Foundation (Canada), Islamic Humanitarian Services, and Imamia Medics International (which supports deserving Shī‘a students who are pursuing medical studies).

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Although *ṣadaqah*, *fiṭrah*, and *khums* are an ongoing source of revenue for Shī‘a centers and organizations, it is not sufficient for the upkeep of all their activities and services. They heavily rely on the generous donations of their members. Keeping in mind the phenomenon of “donor fatigue,” I have presented and encouraged our organizations to revive the “old model” of *waqf* (religious endowments) used in East Africa and the Indian subcontinent for income generating programs to sustain centers and their activities. If you visit Shī‘a communities in East Africa, India, and Pakistan, it is not uncommon for most of the mosques and centers to have commercial or residential properties donated as

waqf, with their income designated toward the upkeep and maintenance of those religious buildings and their activities.⁷

The Shī'a community in Canada has only now taken small steps toward income generating schemes for the maintenance and running of their centers. As-Sādiq Islamic Schools (Thornhill, Ontario), for example, has started a foundation fund where donations are invested and profits can then be used for school operations. The ISIJ is also looking at the legality and logistics of forming a corporation to build a commercial property whose income will be dedicated to sustaining the activities of an organization. The Canada Revenue Agency allows the charities to allocate up to 10% of their annual donations for a foundation fund. Hopefully, this allowance can facilitate models like the *waqf* system that were common in Muslim societies.

Besides philanthropy for the benefit of the local community, the Shī'a community in Canada is also very generous in supporting charitable causes overseas, especially among Shi'a areas in Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and East Africa. It focuses more on poverty relief for orphans and widows and their education as well as medical needs. It has also been very generous in contributing to humanitarian causes in war-torn areas such as Yemen and areas affected by natural disasters.

Muslim Philanthropy for Non-Muslims

Moving on to philanthropy for non-Muslims, I would like to briefly discuss the concept of charity toward non-Muslims from a jurisprudential perspective before presenting a survey of the Shī'a community in Canada. Helping non-Muslims with charity is not a newer addition to Islamic thought; it has been present from the early days of Islam. A decisive verse revealed during the early years after the Prophet's migration to Medina clearly states that "God forbids you not, as regards those who have not fought you in religion's cause, nor expelled you from your homes, that you should be kindly to them, and act justly towards them; surely God loves the just" (Qur'ān 60:8). And so to be kind and just toward non-Muslims who are not your enemies is a guiding principle for Muslims as individuals as well as a community.

This is further reinforced in the Qur'ān, chapter 9 (one of the last chapters to be revealed), verse 60, which enumerates those entitled to receive charity, *ṣadaqah*: (1) the poor, (2) beggars, (3) zakāt collectors, (4) those whose hearts are brought closer, (5) for freeing slaves, (6) debtors, (7) in God's way, and (8) stranded travelers. Two of these eight categories of recipients of charity can easily

⁷ An interesting case in Mombasa, Kenya, is worth noting here. A Shī'a donated his property as *waqf* to the local Shī'a Jamaat with a stipulation that its rental income be used "for serving tea during weekly Thursday night *majlis* and other similar events." Gradually, the rental income of that property has increased while the number of congregates of Mombasa Jamaat is decreasing! A point of reflection for potential donors is that they may choose a cause dear to them but leave a provision in the *waqf* deed that if circumstances change, the trustee(s) would have the right to use it for other similar causes.

accommodate the issue of giving charity to non-Muslims: “4. those whose hearts are brought closer [to Islam and Muslims]” and “7. in God’s way.”

The first refers to non-Muslims who are not hostile toward Islam and Muslims. Although some Shī‘a jurists, including the Ḥanafis and Mālikis, regarded this category as having lapsed after the Prophet,⁸ the majority of Shī‘a jurists consider this to be valid even after the demise of the Prophet and even during the Occultation of the Twelfth Shī‘a Imam.⁹ For example, the top contemporary Shī‘a jurist, Sayyid ‘Ali al-Sīstāni, while describing “those whose hearts are brought closer,” writes:

They are [of two types] either Muslims who are weak in beliefs and in their religious knowledge, so they are given from the *zakāt* in order to improve their Islam and keep them firm on their faith

or they are non-Muslims whom the *zakāt* may incline towards Islam or encourage them to help the Muslims in their defence against their enemies or protect them from their evil and plots. (2017 p. 344)

The second (“in God’s way”) refers, in the majority of Shī‘a opinions, to whatever pleases the Almighty God and all that is beneficial to Muslims, such as building mosques, bridges, and all areas of charity.¹⁰ Al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī (1390) explains the usage of *ṣadaqah* and *zakāt* “in God’s way” as:

Using it in God’s way: that refers to every general act whose benefit returns to Islam and Muslims, and by which the interest of religion is protected; and its most appropriate manifestation is *jihād* in God’s way; and there are other deeds that are also linked to general welfare or benefit like improving the roads, building bridges and etc. (p. 311)

Obviously, roads, bridges, and other similar structures like hospitals cannot be restricted to Muslim use only. And so both these categories of recipients of *zakāt* and charity easily facilitate the process of philanthropy toward non-Muslims.

The Qur’ānic concept of being kind and just toward non-Muslims finds one of its manifestations in the usage of charity for them. For Shī‘a Muslims, this concept is reinforced by examples of the first Imam, ‘Ali bin Abī Ṭālib. When Imam ‘Ali bin Abī Ṭālib appointed Mālik al-Ashtar as the governor-designate for Egypt, he wrote an epistle for him about governance. Referring to the citizens of Egypt who consisted of Muslims and Christians, he wrote: “Habituate your heart to mercy for the subjects and to affection and kindness for them. Do not standover them like greedy beasts who feel it is enough to devour them, since they are

⁸ See the earlier scholar like al-Ṭūsī in his *al-Mabsūṭ*, vol. 1, p. 249, and for the Ḥanafī and Mālikī view, see Bearman et al. (2022, p. 415).

⁹ For the majority view, see al-Rāwandī (d. 573) (1405, p. 227), who quotes a statement from Imām al-Bāqir “...this is applicable for all times.” See also M. al-Ḥilli, (1408, p. 149); ‘A. al-Ḥilli (1413, p. 348); Shahīd I, (1412, p. 313).

¹⁰ See Al-Ṭūsī (1387, p. 252); al-Rāwandī (1405, p. 227); I. I. al-Ḥilli, (1410, pp. 457–458); M. al-Ḥilli (1408, p. 150); ‘A. al-Ḥilli (1413, p. 350); Shahīd I (1412, p. 314).

of two kinds: *either your brethren in faith or like you in creation.*"¹¹

Once Imām ‘Ali, as the ruler of the Muslims, was conducting an inspection of the marketplace in Kufa. He saw an almost-blind elderly man begging on the street. He turned to his officers and asked, “What is this?” One of them replied, “He is a Christian!” Imam ‘Ali’s response was stern, “You used him [as long as he was able to contribute to society with his talent] but now that he has become old, you have deprived him! Provide for him from *bayt al-māl*, the public treasury” (Al-Ṭūsī, 1407, p. 293).

Muslim Philanthropy for Non-Muslims in Canadian Context

Based on the above conceptual backdrop, I would like to focus on philanthropical activities as they pertain to the Shi‘a Ithnā-‘Ashari Muslim community of Canada, especially in the Greater Toronto Area. There were very few Shi‘a families in the Toronto area before the 70s. The influx of Shi‘a Ithna-‘Asharis from Uganda in the early 70s augmented their numbers and became the beginning of an organized Shi‘a community in Canada. They came to Canada when Idi Amin expelled Asians from Uganda, and they were routed through the UN Refugee Agency into Canada. They were welcomed and helped by local agencies to settle in their new homeland.

Once the first generation of refugees and immigrants established themselves, the overarching values of philanthropy enshrined in their faith, coupled with a sense of gratitude toward Canada as their host and new homeland, prepared the Shi‘a community to play its role in helping society at large. This was done on communal as well as individual levels.

Below is a brief survey of how the Shi‘a Ithna-‘Ashari Muslim community, mostly through the Islamic Shia Ithna-‘Ashari Jamaat of Toronto, has undertaken various initiatives to be part of society by helping out in whatever way possible.

1. Just over 20 years ago, a member of the Thornhill Multifaith group came to me with a proposal. The “Out-of-the-Cold” program is an initiative that started in downtown Toronto that provides a hot meal and a place to sleep for the homeless during the cold nights of winter. They wanted to expand this program to this northern suburb of Toronto. The Thornhill Multifaith group wanted this to be a joint program where multiple faith groups in the Thornhill area could participate. Each group took on the responsibility of hosting the homeless once a week for a number of weeks in the winter season. I welcomed this suggestion and sent the proposal with my support

¹¹ Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, (letter no. 53). This is perhaps the first detailed document in the art of governance in Islam. It consists of five main parts: (1) qualifications of a governor and his responsibilities, (2) governance should be in favor of the common man, (3) about the counselors, (4) about different classes of people (the army, the chief justice, the executive officers, the revenue department, the bureaucracy, trader and industry, the poor), (5) communion with God, and (6) on the behavior and actions of a ruler. For more on this epistle, see Shah-Kazemi (2006).

to the executive committee of the ISIJ. Initially, they thought it was a matter of donating money for this project and so it was considered an easy task. However, when I explained that it was a long-term commitment to actually host the homeless people once a week for 10 to 14 weeks during the winter, they realized the scope of the work and the logistics required for it. Fortunately, after further discussion, the executive committee agreed to take on the task.

Of course, during the initial stages, there were some rumblings in the community about “using our funds for others,” and so I decided to dedicate one of my Thursday night weekly sermons to discuss this issue and emphasize our religious and civic duty in helping those who are less fortunate, even if they are from other faiths. I talked about the usage of charity in verse 9:60 of the Qur’ān and the example of Imam ‘Ali (a).

Soon this “Out-of-the-Cold” program every winter became a very popular in the community, with a large volunteer base. All segments of the community, from youth to seniors and from ladies and gents, take part in volunteering for various aspects of this program: from setting up the sleeping area, preparing and serving hot meals in the early evening and a hot breakfast in the early morning. On average, my community is able to serve about 50 people for the meals and about 30 to 40 for sleeping accommodations once a week during the 10 to 12 weeks of winter allocated to us.

2. The ISIJ’s affiliate center in Brampton has initiated a Masumeen Muslim Food Bank (MMFB) that delivers monthly food packages to families in need in a private and confidential manner. These families are from multiple faiths and ethnicities in the western Greater Toronto Area. The food packages contain non-perishable pantry items, halal protein, fruits and vegetables, toiletries, hygiene products, and gift cards to supplement any perishable necessities such as dairy products. In 2020, the MMFB provided monthly food packages for 228 families. MMFB also partnered with the Knights Table soup kitchen and served and delivered over 2,000 meals in 2020. MMFB also provided 1,000 winter care packages to St. Leonard’s Place in Peel to be distributed to their residents, who are mainly men, dealing with homelessness, mental health issues, and addiction.
3. For the last three years, members of the ISIJ have participated in the Big Bike fundraising drive for the “Heart and Stroke Foundation.” In total, they have raised just over \$24,000.
4. The Mackenzie Health Foundation in the Richmond Hill and Vaughan areas is building a new hospital, Cortellucci Hospital, in Vaughan. The Islamic Shia Ithna-‘Ashari Jamaat has committed to contribute \$1,000,000 over seven years, of which \$390,000 has already been donated. Since

many members of our community reside in these areas, this is our way of supporting the local community and health care system.

5. With the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shortage of supplies at medical facilities, the Islamic Shia Ithna-‘Ashari Jamaat donated \$25,000 to the Mackenzie Health Hospital in Richmond Hill in the form of supplies such as gloves, masks, sanitizer, etc. At the same time, the community had carried out food deliveries to health care workers at Mackenzie Health Hospital and Credit Valley Hospital (in Mississauga).
6. In 2014, the Masumeen Islamic Centre joined the efforts of “the Muslim Friends of William Osler Health Centre” and donated on behalf of its members a sum of \$25,000 for one room at the hospital.
7. Being an immigrant community or the children of immigrants, the Muslim community is not oblivious to the plights and challenges facing the indigenous people of Canada. As a small token of appreciation, the ISIJ donated \$10,000 to Georgina Island (just north of Toronto), which is a Native reserve populated by the Chippewas, a band of the Ojibwa people.
8. The Out-Reach Committee of the ISIJ started the “Messengers for Peace” initiative to help less fortunate members of society at large. Since 2011, it has been able provide meals on a monthly basis for 10,000 homeless individuals and also to homeless shelters within the Greater Toronto Area. In addition to that, it organizes a winter clothing campaign every December, raising funds to collect clothing such as jackets, hats, socks, and scarves for the poor and the needy.
9. ISIJ also donated \$1,500 to Home Depot Youth, a program to support youth development in the community.
10. Furthermore, ISIJ donated \$5,800 to “Habitat for Humanity” to further efforts in creating permanent shelter for those who need it.

The above reflects a glimpse into the philanthropy done by the Shi‘a community. Fortunately, the Shi‘a community also has individuals who have contributed toward charitable causes in their own capacity. Here are some examples:

1. Muslim Women of York Region (presently known as Salaam Foundation) is a charitable organization run by Shi‘a Ithnā-‘Ashari women. WMYR participates in various charitable activities such as:
 - a. Supplying over 6,000 meals to frontline workers at seven hospitals, fire halls, and police stations.
 - b. Providing over 3,000 home-cooked meals to Sandgate Women’s Shelter.
 - c. Continues to serve over six foodbanks with chicken and ground beef for all plus \$1,000 worth of groceries each month.

- d. Continues to provide soup kitchens with 130 meals a week from a professional kitchen in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Ontario.
- e. Supplied PPE to senior homes, foodbanks, and shelters throughout the pandemic.
- f. Supplied over 1,000 masks (sewn by community women) to seniors, shelter workers, and frontline-workers.

2. Global Kindness Foundation is a charity established by Dr. Hasnain Dewji and his wife, Fatemah, from Vancouver, B.C. They were able to assemble a group of Shi'a Ithnā-ʿAshari dentists in Canada and started organizing dental missions to Iraq, Syria, India, Cambodia, Haiti, Tanzania, Kenya, and Peru to help the children in poor neighborhoods with their dental hygiene. As shown in the list above, the countries served by GKF are not restricted to Shi'a or Muslims, they also organize camps in non-Muslim countries. Gradually its scope has expanded to include medical, optical, and audiology services.

3. Sajjad Ebrahim, a Canadian Shi'a of Pakistani origin, and his family donated a gift of \$2.5 million to William Osler Health System Foundation. Mr. Ebrahim said, "I am extremely grateful to God for this opportunity to make this gift. It is an honour and a privilege to be able to do this. I am grateful to Canada for the opportunities we have found in this great country." Mr. Ebrahim also donated \$600,000 through Ryerson University Lifeline Syria Challenge (RULSC) to help 20 deserving refugee families start the next chapter of their lives in Canada with dignity.

4. Sajjadiyya Trust of Toronto recently donated \$97,033.50 to Grenoble Public School in North York (Toronto) during the COVID-19 pandemic for the purchase of 250 laptops to facilitate online schooling.

5. Latif Fazel, a member of the Shi'a Islamic Ithnā-ʿAshari community, suffered two heart attacks in 2002. In the course of his treatment, he was stabilized at the emergency department at Mackenzie Health in Richmond Hill, then transferred to the Regional Cardiac Centre at Southlake Hospital in Newmarket. He was impressed with the facilities and the commitment of the health system. "I was inspired to support the hospital," he says. That sense of appreciation motivated him to volunteer, and he has since then offered his time as a member of the Mackenzie Health Foundation's Board of Directors. It was through his efforts that the hospital secured a second MRI machine, which cost \$5 million, including the purchase and housing upgrades. Mr. Fazel personally has donated a substantial amount to the hospital. Mr. Latif Fazel echoes the sense of appreciation and the urge to contribute, as taught by Islam, of new immigrants: "As a new immigrant, you try to adjust yourself to the climate, the culture, the environment, the way of doing business. The first 10 years of any pioneer is spent in settling down and looking after your family. Then people start looking around themselves and thinking about

supporting the community they live in.”¹²

Conclusion

Inspired by the overarching values of the Qur’ān and the examples of the Prophet Muḥammad and the Shī’a Imāms, the Shī’a Ithnā-‘Ashari Muslim community in Canada has lived up to the ideals of philanthropy in three areas:

- (a) Helping community members locally.
- (b) Helping fellow Shī’as in Muslim countries.
- (c) Helping non-Muslims in Canada.

This philanthropical work is sustained through religious dues such as *ṣadaqah*, *khums*, *fiṭrah*, and *fidyah* as well as general donations from individual members. The Shī’a community in Canada, which has always been very generous in supporting causes of fellow Shī’as locally and overseas, has also been forthcoming in contributing to the well-being of the wider community in Canada. Their focus has been on the relief of poverty for the poor and needy as well as support for local medical facilities and basic needs relief efforts.

The above survey is a good measure of the integration of a minority in society through the lens of philanthropy and an example of how the Canadian value of multiculturalism and core Islamic values can converge to foster a charitable and caring community.

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¹² The observations about the Shī’a Ithnā-‘Ashari Muslim community in Canada are based on my close contact with the community in my capacity as the Imam of the Shi’a Muslim Community of British Columbia (1983–1991), as the Imam of the Islamic Shi’a Ithnā-‘Ashari Jamaat of Toronto (since 1996 to the present), and as the founding trustee of As-Sadiq Islamic Schools. I was also blessed to be part of many other projects in Shī’a communities in different parts of Canada.

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