

Enduring Financial Debt: An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract: This paper investigates some of the major concepts on indebtedness in Islam while shedding light on the spiritual and moral implications associated with indebtedness, for both debtors and lenders. The research further shows that Islam capitalizes on the spiritual and moral reservoir of Muslims in dealing with life financial difficulties and that it further sets a number of religious measures that not only ease the emotional and social distress of debtors, but also protect the rights of lenders while sustaining communal piety, dignity and responsibility.

Key words: Indebtedness • Financial difficulty • Islam • Spirituality • Morality

INTRODUCTION

Islam encourages its followers to work hard, depend on their own and to be independent and self-content. Financial independence in Islam is responsible for sustaining a social system; albeit one in which its community members are exhorted to enjoy the blessings of life or to share their material and moral resources for public welfare. A perusal of Islamic religious traditions exhibits Islam's fervent commitment to Muslims' financial moderation with life balance, justice and compassion. It is within such an expansive scope of such a broad view that one needs to understand the position of Islam on Muslims' financial engagement and on other related issues such as earning, distribution and charity, as well as credit and debt.

Yet, in order for one to better understand the framework of the Islamic religion on indebtedness, one must first draw on the semantics of the word. The word *dayn* (debt) in the Arabic language implies submission and humiliation [1]. The relationship between the linguistic and legal definitions is thus, obvious. The debtor who is known as *madin* is akin to being a detained

person or a prisoner, as described in the following Prophetic tradition: "Your companion is being detained by his debt" [2]. Moreover, Muslim jurists agree that debt (*dayn*) is a financial obligation that must be discharged [3]. Islam also uses the term *gharim* (debtor) to describe any indebted person failing to repay his debt. According to Abu Hanifah (d. 765AD) however, a debtor is one who carries a debt and is unable to accumulate the *nisab* over his debt [4]. Such an indebted is considered to be poor and hence is entitled to Zakat [3].

Muslim jurists such as Malik (d.795), Shafi'i (d.820) and Ahmad (d.855) argue that debt, whether personal or public, may be held on the behalf of the individual or group [5]. Personal debt may be utilized in the purchase of a shelter, furniture, medicine; or in building a home, being used in marriage as well as in other non-extravagant expenses [6, 7]. Debts incurred on behalf of the public however, entitle debtors to repayment from the Muslim public treasury [8]. Similarly, personal debts that exhaust one's wealth are either used in dealing with circumstances of exigency such as natural disasters or in acquiring bare necessities; all of which would also be paid from Zakat or endowment funds [8]. It should be noted however, that

according to Islamic law, the clearance of debts from Zakat funds requires a verification of the legitimate needs of the debtors; this should not necessarily represent a case of financial destitution. Debtors' assets include homes, clothing, beds, utensils, servants and transport, but should however, -when necessary- stay out of the creditors' grasp.

Debts incurred on behalf of the public in the good interest and benefit of other individuals or the community; as in cases of reconciliation are considered to be a rewarding charity [9]. The noble acts of such individuals extinguish enmity, hatred and disunity, while effectively building peace and harmony. Islam accords said individuals an honourable status and grants them the legal right of payment of their incurred debts from Zakat even when reconciliation is made among non-Muslim groups. According to the Shafi'i School of Law, debts incurred for beneficial public services qualify for Zakat coverage even when the debtors themselves are wealthy [8]. This is logically understandable in light of Islam's decided interest in the building of community understanding, reconciliation and cohesion.

Indebtedness incurred for the good of the community and causes related to it further demonstrate that debt is capable of acquiring an inherently positive social value and may turn into a highly recommended act of piety and nobility. It further follows that philanthropic/charitable contributions made specifically for the community's public interest including the establishment of learning institutions, places of worship, hospitals and orphanages are deserving of financial attention from the state treasury [10].

Religious Gravity of Debt: For Muslims, personal debt is not an estimable practice, as they are exhorted and encouraged to earn their living through legitimate means, eschewing any circumstance that would lead to resorting to borrowing. On numerous occasions, Islamic traditions point to the fact that indebtedness may not only affect the conditions of a Muslim's life, but also holds sway over the eschatological world as well. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have abstained from performing a funeral prayer on a deceased debtor as illustrated in the following tradition. Prophet Muhammad would ask his companions whether the indebted deceased had anything with which to pay off his debt. If he had nothing, he would say, 'Pray on your man (yourselves) [11]. In another narration on the authority of Jabir, the Prophet was asked, 'Will you pray on him?' He took a few steps and then said, 'Has he any debts?' We replied, 'He has a debt of two dinars.' Upon

hearing that, the Prophet went away. His companion Abu Qatadah then took charge of the debt. We thereafter went to the Prophet and Abu Qatadah told him, 'I would pay the two dinars.' The Prophet then said, 'The creditor's right is guaranteed and the deceased is free from debt?' He said, 'Yes.' The Prophet then prayed on him [12].

The Prophet's eschewing of the funeral prayer carries significant gravitas; most notably due to the importance of the rite, which is in essence a prayer of mercy and compassion for the deceased. For any Muslim, the prospect of not being granted mercy following death is horrendously appalling and as such, this particular example establishes a dreadful perception of debt from all its aspects. Other narrations however, exhibit a change in the Prophet's disposition to deceased Muslims, especially when he, as a leader of the Muslim community, would say to the public: 'I am closer to the Muslims than their own selves; whoever dies among them and has debts, I will be responsible for his debts.' This, according to the tradition, was when God opened the treasures for him as a result of the conquests.

The practice of the Prophet clearly exemplifies how debtors are not merited the honour of a farewell prayer by the Prophet; an action no different than death brought about by suicide. Yet while one may not fully fathom all the reasons behind the Prophet's abstinence from leading the funeral prayer on Muslim debtors, a logical link may nonetheless be drawn between a communal religious ritual such as the funeral prayer and the deceased's state of debt. The explanation rests in the fact that such an apparently weighty action strongly reinforces the concept of the gravity of debts and of the seriousness attached to the inability repaying those debts. These traditions however, show how through religious modeling, the Prophet Muhammad publicly pursued the dissemination of a culture of debt clearance through effective focus on its weight as well as the ramifications and detriments of outstanding debts. This is further shown in the following saying of Prophet Muhammad: "The greatest sin is that a man dies while he has debt due from him and does not leave anything to pay it off and meets Him with it".

The interpretation of such religious traditions however, depends on the financial conditions, commitments and reasons of the debtor; as it is legitimate for Muslims to borrow for personal needs and other public causes so long as they demonstrate commitment to the repayment of their debts. The first prerequisite relates more to the reasonably religious accommodation of the Muslim's financial crisis. The second concerns the support of financially viable communities and the

appraisal of financial wisdom while the third relates to the religious and moral responsibility of discharging financial responsibilities. It is probably in this context that we understand Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's opinion that the debt for which a person will be kept out of Paradise is that for which he left behind enough to repay, but did not leave instructions to that effect, or was able to pay it off but did not do so, or took the loan for unlawful or extravagant matters and died without paying returning it. As for the one who took a loan for a lawful need or cause because he was poor and died without leaving behind anything to pay it off, God will not keep him from Paradise because of it [13].

Muslim scholars argue that the Prophet's abstention from prayer on debtors when they died stemmed from the fact that his prayer is an intercession that is always accepted while nothing cancels debts except its repayment. These traditions effectively underscore the religious gravity of debt, yet leave ample room for cases of necessity and need as in the case of debts incurred for purposes of education, travel, health and so on and so forth. This is further reinforced in the following tradition in which Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "The soul of the Muslim is suspended because of debt until it is paid off". Suyuti (d.1505 AD) comments: "It [the soul] is detained and kept from reaching its noble destination." These traditions weave together a holistic awareness on the gravity of debt and a deep rooted consciousness of the religious consequences of indebtedness while simultaneously training Muslims on moral integrity vis-à-vis creditor and loans. Taken together, these traditions tackle both the question of debtors and creditors and acts of borrowing and repayment while reinforcing aspects of piety and devotion as the platform for debt behaviour management.

Indebtedness however, does not remove from religious piety and morality. The Prophet Muhammad himself at one point was indebted and faced difficulties in paying it off. His example on indebtedness reveals legitimacy in the life of the Muslim individual and the community. As such, the crucial point is repaying debt back while maintaining the community and state of religious and moral responsibility. 'Aisha the wife of the Prophet reported that he bought foodstuffs on credit for a limited period of time and mortgaged his armour for it [14]. He is also reported to have borrowed a camel from a Bedouin at a time of scarcity for the poor who were deserving beneficiaries of Zakat. He wanted to slaughter the camel to feed them or to sell it and buy provisions for them. One also comes across Ibn 'Umar's advice to Humran in which he said: "Oh Humran, fear God and do

not die in debt, lest it be taken from your good deeds when there will be no dinars and no dirhams". The religious texts cited above provide legitimate allowances for debts regarding which Muslim scholars have stipulated three conditions; namely that the borrower should be determined for repayment; in essence that it should be known or most likely expected that the debtor is able to repay it; and that the loan should be made for items of religious permissibility.

Debtor's Religious and Moral Responsibility: Islam sets two types of rights (*huquq*). One belongs to God and the other to people. Religious duties however, cannot be fully discharged without a complete clearance of financial public obligations. Such a principle forges a link between religion and public financial obligations leading to far reaching ramifications. The negative influences of financial responsibilities that have yet to be discharged spoils the purity of worship while potentially religiously affecting the acceptance of piety and religious deeds even for those who sacrifice their own lives for God. This meaning finds support in the following prophetic tradition: "By the One in Whose hand is my soul, if a man were killed in battle for the sake of God, then brought back to life, then killed and brought back to life again, then killed and he owed a debt, he would not enter Paradise until his debt was paid off." This tradition further deepens Muslim consciousness of the fact that obtaining divine pleasure is balanced upon the discharge of financial dues and that one's spiritual devotion to God is not genuine while people's financial rights are violated.

An important message according to many religious traditions however, is the debtor's state of mind. Islam gives due attention to the debtor's intention, thought and moral commitment to debt payment. In fact, Islam grants positive commitment as shown in divine assistance to debt payment and decries any negative thoughts towards loans and debts. This extends beyond the superficial face of contracts and agreements to deeply touch on the spiritual, moral and emotional state of Muslim religious life while constantly reinforcing financial trust and security. It is in this context that we grasp the implications of the tradition of the Prophet in which he is reported to have said: "Whoever takes people's money (by debt) with the intention of paying it back, God will pay it back on his behalf and whoever takes it with the intention of usurping it, God will destroy him" [14].

God's paying the debtor's loan speaks not only of a sort of divine interference, but also characterises a strong religious presence in Muslim financial management while

merging the sacred with the profane. Hence, it is understood why thoughts and decisions of financial unaccountability entail a life of difficulty and hardship, a lack of blessings, in addition to the incurring of severe consequences in the Hereafter. Muslims are thus instructed to clear their outstanding debts first, as reported in the following tradition; "Deferring of paying outstanding debts on the part of rich people is injustice" [15]. Other similar traditions invoke not only torment and punishment in the eschatological world, but raise the equally important issue of credibility and honour. This is understood in accordance with the saying of the Prophet in which he is reported to have said; "The delay of a capable man in paying his debts desecrates his honour and makes him liable to punishment". This meaning is significant for it effectively links the individual's self-worth to morality while sustaining the societal fabric through individual financial prudence first followed by the application of law.

Indebtedness and Muslim Integrity: In this section we shall examine the religious and moral implications of debt for Muslims and more specifically; understand how debt affects the integrity of Muslims. In a commonly used religious invocation, Muslims seek refuge in God from excessive debt (*ghalabat al-dayn*) and the abuse of people; the prime contention being that indebtedness results in inevitable stressful and abusive conditions. The recitation of such an invocation connects Muslims to their real world while maintaining a religious awareness of both financial planning, responsibility and accountability. Muslims' over-indebtedness affects their religious integrity in numerous varying degrees. In the spiritual world, Muslims strive to liberate their minds and souls from all sorts of pressures that might affect their religious, social and physical health. Pilgrimage for instance explains the need of Muslims to discharge their financial duties lest their religious integrity become at stake. Prior to Hajj, Muslim are religiously recommended as well as culturally accustomed to clearing their personal debts and fixing issues pertaining to public rights. In fact, according to a number of Muslims jurists, Muslims are not permitted to perform the obligation of pilgrimage with debts and loans. Other legal opinions allow it when the debtor is confidently able to pay the debts back.

Debt is seen as source of humiliation during the day and anxiety during the night. The second Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (d. 644 CE) bases his cautioning on indebtedness on the very fact that debt begins with worry and ends with hostility. For instance, Qurtubi (d. 1273CE)

elaborates on the effects of debt on the Muslim at the individual level in light of the following statement of Muslim scholars: "Debts are a disgrace and a humiliation as they preoccupy the mind and cause one to worry about paying it off. Debts also cause feelings of humiliation, particularly when meeting the lender, or a feeling that he is being done a favour when accepting a delay in payment. The debtor may potentially commit himself to paying off the debt then find himself unable but to break the promise; whereupon he may lie to the money lender, or even swear an oath to him then break it. The Debtor may also die without clearing his debt which will cause him to be confined for it". The following traditions of the Prophet reinforce this meaning: "When a man gets into debt, he speaks and tells lies and he makes a promise and breaks it" [14, 15]. "The soul of the Muslim is held hostage by his debt in his grave until it is paid off." On the community level however, scholars have described the negative consequences and the dangers indebtedness poses to the economy; most notable among which is the desire for immediate gratification with no thought of the future, the lack of responsibility and self-reliance and the poor distribution of wealth.

Islam's perspective on indebtedness highlights a number of interesting ethical points. First, Muslims are required to continually cultivate a sincere character for financial accountability, honour their financial commitments, discharge all of their responsibilities, avoid extravagant spending, eschew financial gambling and ensure that their business is fair and interest-free. Those religious instructions shape and control Muslim's thought, emotions and decisions with regards to financial loans and payment. What sculpts the financial situation of a Muslim debtor however, worse is not persuading the religious and moral persuasions imbedded in the socio-religious culture require honesty and sincerity with creditors, but also the belief that spiritual and moral perfection is ever deficient without the total discharge of financial obligations and commitment to financial responsibilities towards one's household, families and community. As such, an intrinsic, intimate association appears to exist between indebtedness and moral uprightness as shown in the following Prophetic invocation: "O God, I seek refuge with You from sin and heavy debt" [12].

Remarkably enough, when debts exhaust all the revenues of a Muslim person, they would then be described according to the teachings of Islam, as a poor (*faqir*) or needy (*miskin*) individual and thereby be entitled to financial support stemming from the community.

Though zakat and charity (*sadaqa*) are normal practices in Muslim societies, their emotional implications are far less apparent. Receiving charity is not always pleasant, particularly for those whose financial needs force them to shift their respective social status from the donor to a receiver. Furthermore, the debtor's religious life cannot be distanced from the life of the community which seeks to continually sustain favourable avenues for spiritual and intellectual education, socialization and support. For debtors however, such highly communal religious occasions may turn into causes of embarrassment, increased stress and frustration. Should a Muslim debts force him Muslim to avoid community life, he may then skip a number of communal obligations and would have also consequently violated a number of religious instructions concerning adherence to the *Jama'ah* (group and community).

Those community's religious practices for instance include the obligatory Friday prayer which Muslim male must performed with the congregation and preferably in larger Mosques. The community's religious far encompassing spirit of fasting, pilgrimage, funeral functions and regular daily prayers, are also performed in a congregational manner. Yearly Islamic celebrations such as the end of the fasting month of Ramadan (*'id-ul-Fitr*), followed by the charity of *Zakat al-Fitr* on behalf of the household, the celebration of the days of sacrifice (*'id-ul-Adha*); all indirectly add to the debtor's stress, not only due to the debtor's possible inability to afford a sacrifice or his failure to attend those celebrations with the family in joy, but furthermore due to complex reactions elicited by one's household, friends, family, neighbours, community and worse, by impatient creditors. Interestingly enough, the understanding accorded to an indebted person serves not only as pressure relief, but also as an encouragement to work harder to relieve themselves of debt due to the dread and self-accorded shame that lingers with them in such a state.

Alleviating Financial Difficulty: The common practice during the pre-Islamic era was for debtors to either repay their loans or accumulate interest on the debt principle [16]. With the advent of Islam, a radically different approach was introduced to the Arabian society; one which sought to capitalize on ease and grace instead of abusive financial exploitation without compromising the rights of creditors. The principal element of Islam's approach to debtors is to first avoid all forms of incurred interest on debt and to model a new relationship between

creditors and debtors on humanitarian and moral grounds. In Islam, lending should not be used as an instrument of exploitation or abuse, or taken as a means to undermine the moral platform of a sustainable social network and values. The position of Islam on indebtedness however, is very clear as shown in examples of the Quran's encouragement of creditors to give debtors respite regarding their debts while promising good and great rewards as a compensation for their righteousness. Muslim creditors are exhorted to adhere to a path of ease (*maysara*) towards their debtors, to show patience towards debtors' difficulty and to write off their loans partially or completely as mentioned in the following verses: "And if the debtor is in straitened circumstances, then (let there be) postponement to (the time of) ease; and that ye remit the debt as almsgiving would be better for you if ye did but know" (Qur'an, 2:280). According to Tabari (d. 923), this verse was revealed with regards to those who embraced Islam during the time of the Prophet, yet were debtors (*ghurama'*) carrying debts from earlier periods of pre-Islamic society.

The Prophetic traditions further entrench and consolidate the position of the Quran on financial ease towards debtors. For instance, one of the companions of Prophet Muhammad is reported to have been heavily indebted as a result of business bankruptcy after which the Prophet requested his companions to donate to the said companion. However, their charity could not pay off all incurred debts. It was then that Prophet Muhammad said to creditors; "Take what you find and you shall have nothing else than that" [17]. While the examples of collective altruistic repayment of debt are rather remarkable, one specifically witnesses here that although the protection of the creditor's rights is essential, it is not prioritised over that of the debtor; leading to a balanced relationship between the two and ensuring sustained harmony and a spirit of mutuality throughout society.

In another report, one of the Prophet's companions by the name of Abu Qatadah gave a loan to a person who could not pay off his debt and used to hide from him. One day, Abu Qatadah was looking for his debtor and called upon the debtor in his house in a loud voice, "O Fellow! Come out, for I was told that you are in the house." The man came out and Abu Qatadah asked him, "Why are you hiding from me?" The man said, "I am having a hard time financially and I do not have any money." Abu Qatadah asked, "By Allah, are you truly facing a hard time?" He said, "Yes." Abu Qatadah cried and said, "I heard the Messenger of Allah say, (Whoever

gives time to his debtor, or forgives the debt, will be in the shade of the Throne (of Allah) on the Day of Resurrection)". This is but one of many examples where the spirit of forgiveness was engendered and manifested. A salient feature of such magnanimity is often the valuing of spiritual value over material needs.

One of the many avenues leading however to alleviating of debtor's hardship, the prevention of spreading bankruptcies, escalating of financial crisis and protecting creditors from loss would be through the proper allocation of Zakat shares, good loans, community support and prevention of financial exploitation or abuse. With regards to this, the state may contribute to the alleviation of citizens' financial over-indebtedness as shown in the early governmental precedent set by the fifth Caliph 'Umar Ibn 'Abdul 'Aziz (d. 719 CE) to his delegates: "Pay off debtors' debt." Someone wrote back to him in reply: "But we find debtors in possession of a home, servant, horse and furniture." The official response of the governor was: "The Muslim needs a house for shelter, furniture, a servant for assistance and a horse for combat. Pay lenders on the debtor's behalf." The level of understanding accorded to the indebted here is remarkable. While bankruptcy is by essence characterised by frugality and austerity; the example provided above possesses none of the usual; essentially pointing towards a rather unique understanding of debt and repayment resulting in the observance of the civil minimum.

In a number of religious traditions Islam nonetheless recommends a course of financial ease and grace towards debtors leading to the alleviation of their hardship and difficulty as shown in the following tradition: "Whoever makes things easy for a person in hardship, Allah will make things easy for him in this world and the hereafter" and "Whosoever wishes his supplications to be accepted or his hardships to be removed should remove hardship from the poor." One of the traditions commonly discussed on the issue of treating debtors with grace and the exhortation of writing off debts goes as follows: "From the people preceding your generation, there was a man whom the angel visited to take away his soul. (After it was taken away) he was asked if he had done any good deeds. He replied, 'I do not remember any good deeds.' He was asked to think it over and he said, 'I cannot recall any save that I used to trade with people in the world and was lenient with them. I gave respite to the rich and forgave the poor.' So God made him enter Paradise" [18]. Once more, spiritual virtue is greatly lauded in contrast to the material. Interestingly enough, the interest of the lender is

maintained by the fact that forgiving the debt is not forced or required. It also becomes worthy to note the exchange so to speak, of spiritual currency in the exchange of material interests with no limiting cap placed on the amount of spiritual wealth one may attain.

Muslims are encouraged to assist the indebted as a reflection of religious brotherhood and moral values and as an act of piety pleasing God. For Ibn Rajab (d.1393), the tradition of Prophet Muhammad on debt leniency implies that the hereafter also involves hardship. For him, ease with debtors requires the writing off of debt, especially when the person is heavily indebted, thereby removing his hardship [16]. Prophet Muhammad further exemplifies this reality by stating; "Whoever gives respite to a poor person or writes off his debt, God will put him under His shade on a day on which there will be no shade except His." He also said: "Whoever gives time to a debtor facing hard times, will earn charity multiplied by two times for each day he gives." One companion said, 'O Messenger of Allah! I heard you say, 'Whoever gives time to a debtor facing hard times, will gain charity of equal proportions for each day he gives.' I also heard you say, 'Whoever gives time to a debtor facing hard times, will earn charity multiplied by two times for each day he gives' [19].

Support of the Community: Islam's approach to the financial difficulty and hardship of debtors is manifested in its system of social support. The Muslim community's regular spiritual and religious exercises are fertile ground for increased acquaintance, interaction and support. The nature of many of Islam's religious practices point to the communal texture of religiosity whereby members of the community console, counsel each other and support one another on a variety of occasions and events. For Muslims however, sharing with others is a recommended act of piety, especially during times of need, sickness, sadness, death, or catastrophe. This support may be undertaken individually or institutionally, in different forms of the giving of charities, gifts, Zakat, endowments, or pilgrimage on the behalf of other Muslims.

What further highlights the community's religious responsibility to debtors is its respective handling of debts left by deceased Muslims. Muslims are exhorted to compose a will in which all their debts must be recorded. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "It is not right for a Muslim who has property regarding which he must make a will that he should sleep for two nights (consecutively) but that his will should be written down

with him” [20]. Muslim jurists however, differ in regards to the accumulated debt of deceased Muslims and whether they should be paid from the Zakat fund. Some jurists interdict it while others allow it. The argument used for interdiction is based on the fact that the Shari‘a’s use of Zakat funds to pay off debts is set to reduce, if not completely eliminate any circumstance of the debtor’s disgrace and embarrassment, which clearly does not apply to the deceased. They maintain that writing off the deceased’s debts would clearly violate the rights of creditors for the reason that as a general principle, people tend to pity deceased people and write off their debts while the Shari‘a seeks to protect the rights of creditors and ensure that they fully recover from their debts.

Qurtubi however, maintains that the debts of the deceased should be paid from the Zakat fund because even after death, indebted individuals continue to be regarded among the category of the highly indebted (*gharimin*) as mentioned in the Quran (Qurtubi, 8:185). Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) holds the same opinion. These legal views find support in the tradition of Prophet Muhammad in which he is reported to have said: “By Him in Whose Hand is the life of Muhammad, there is no believer on the earth with whom I am not the nearest among all the people. He who amongst you (dies) and leaves a debt, I am there to pay it and he who amongst you (dies) leaving behind children I am there to look after them. And he who amongst you leaves behind property that is for the inheritor whoever he is [14, 15].

Muslims families need to spend on indebted children; providing them with all the moral support necessary to overcome any burdening financial difficulty. Society’s role in solving debts problems is no less important. Compulsory alms (Zakat) and voluntary charity are paid and directed to indebted individuals. Good loans (*qard hasan*), social cooperatives and endowments are all good forms of tackling over-indebtedness. On the other hand, lenders are required to adhere to a moral course of ease and mercy and to exercise the partial or full writing off of parts of their debts (*ibra*). Additionally, the state needs to assist indebted people, alive or dead, with their debts and pay off some or all their debts, in addition to providing gifts (*hibah*) to the indebted. Islamic law for instance establishes a number of other interesting means of tackling the problem of over-indebtedness as found in the case with the *hawala* (debt transfer), *kafalah* (debt guarantee), *dhaman* (contract of guarantee), *sulh* (binding agreement of peace) and the *ibra* (rebate).

Spirituality and Management of Over-Indebtedness:

Islam’s many religious invocations appear to deepen a sense of resentment possibly leading to the prevention of indebtedness. In the process whereby the profane is brought into the folds of the sacred and where life and spiritual experiences are mutually merged, a number of Islamic invocations shape Muslims’ cognitive attitude vis-à-vis the moral and religious implications of indebtedness. Those religious prayers and supplications essentially seek to sustain a healthy financial state of the individual and society while ensuring a positive bridging between spirituality, morality and life. It is through the mastery of spirituality that a Muslim may develop a sense of inner peace and balance, cultivate a healthy religious lifestyle and acquire an increased awareness of the need for financial responsibility and accountability while avoiding personal conditions of emotional unrest or self denial. One of these famous prayers is found in the supplication reported on the authority of Prophet Muhammad who used to say: “O God, I seek refuge with You from sin (*ma’tam*) and heavy debt (*maghram*)” [14]. This tradition places added significant weight on debt, while additionally underscoring the need to free oneself from sins. Furthermore, it decries heavy debt in the same way in which it decries sinning, as if heavy debt displeases God, contaminates the purity of religiosity and disturbs spiritual devotion.

Islam also sets a number of interesting spiritual guidelines to help Muslims internalize the value of financial independence and the risk associated with borrowing. In light of those guidelines, one may notice a closely built association between the state of indebtedness and the spiritual practices of Muslims. Such an association probably seeks to raise the level of trust, positive self-esteem and peace while slowly curtailing the growing effects of stress and anxiety, often resulting from the inability to pay back creditors. Such supplications seek to specifically enhance debtors’ spiritual consciousness, endorse self-assurance while sustaining the hope and confidence of Muslim the through building an increased yet positive level of belief in God’s support for the elimination of debts. One of those traditions, while tackling the physical and spiritual states of Muslim, exhorts the debtor to lay down on the right side in sleep and say: “O God, Lord of the seven heavens and the exalted Throne, our Lord and Lord of all things, splitter of the seed and the date-stone, Revealer of the Torah and the Gospel and the Qur’an, I seek refuge in You from the evil of all things You shall seize by the forelock [have total mastery over]. O God, You are the

First so there is nothing before You and You are the Last so there is nothing after You. You are the greatest and highest so there is nothing above You and You are aware of the subtlest secrets so there is nothing closer than You. Settle our debt for us and spare us from poverty" [21].

The impact of Muslims' spiritual activity on debt management is exemplified in a prayer that is apparently set to specifically assist Muslim debtors in encountering and overcoming stress and grief. It is reported that Prophet Muhammad entered the mosque and saw a man by the name of Abu Umamah. He said to him: "O Abu Umamah, why do I see you sitting in the mosque when it is not the time for prayer?" He replied, "Worries and debts, O Messenger of God." The Prophet said: "Shall I not teach you some words which, if you say them, God will take away your worries and pay off your debts?" He affirmatively replied: "Yes, O Messenger of God." The Prophet then said: "Say, morning and evening, 'O God, I seek refuge with You from worry and grief and I seek refuge with You from incapacitation and laziness and I seek refuge with You from cowardice and miserliness and I seek refuge with You from being the burdens of indebtedness and from being overcome by men)". He said: I did that and God took away my worry and paid off my debt. Prophet Muhammad instructed Muslims to recite the last two verses of Chapter two of the Quran at night as that will suffice them [14]. The Prophet's equating of debt with the negative states of cowardice, disability and worry strongly impressed the undesirability of debt upon his listeners. His traditions have always included spirituality and divinity as a significant factor in the dissolution or easing of the burden of the indebted individual. Aside from the relief brought about by societal consciousness and care granted to the indebted, the supplication itself serves as a soothing means of catharsis and reassurance for the individual in need.

The spiritual practice reinforces the power of prayers in the life of the Muslim while maintaining a positive emotional and intellectual state of debtors. Spirituality here is not used to conceal the reality of debt nor to justify irresponsibility and non-accountability, but rather, to cultivate the very essence of piety and morality so as to better manage the debt crisis. Islamic literature provides us with prime examples of undertaking certain spiritual rituals to alleviate the psychological burden of debt as shown in the following. It is reported that a slave who had entered into a contract of manumission approached Ali, one of the Prophet's companion and said to him: "I am

unable to pay off my manumission; help me." He said: "Shall I not tell you some words which the Messenger of God taught me? And if you have debt like the mountain of Seer, God will pay it off for you?" He said: 'Say: O God, suffice me with what You have permitted so that that I have no need of that which You have forbidden and make me independent of means by Your bounty so that I have no need of anyone besides You" [15].

CONCLUSION

For Muslims, indebtedness is connected to both piety and religiosity. The striving for financial independence, in addition to giving loans to others in need and showcasing ease and compassion are integral segments of positive Muslim religious devotion and moral character. Like any other life difficulty however, enduring financial problems engages not only debtors and their respective households, but also calls for the support of the community of the believers, government and society at large. Islam's approach to over-indebtedness however, involves the clear role of the indebted who is required to exercise financial wisdom during ease and comfort, to adhere to moderate spending during debts and to maintain a strong commitment to the clearance of all debts, while applying religious and spiritual teachings with regards to debt so as to maintain a balance between oneself and society. Yet, while the teachings of Islam acknowledge the negative emotional effects of over-indebtedness, as well as the possible effects of financial difficulty on not only the health and mind of individuals and groups, but also on their religious ascension as well; it nonetheless effectively integrates such an understanding into a spiritual and moral conditioning that not only contributes to the alleviation of psychological burdens carried on the shoulders of the indebted while also assuring the rights of creditors, parallel to a far more holistic, proactive and active role played by society and government. Enduring the consequences of financial difficulties entails a broader concept of moral and religious consciousness which secures social justice, equity and solidarity.

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