

Inf'aq: A Forgotten Talim of the Qur'an

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Abstract: *This paper revisits the Qur'ani and Nabawi ethic of Inf'aq-voluntary spending in the way of Allah-at a time when economic fragility and humanitarian distress intensify social inequality. Taking its lexical meaning as "spending or disbursement," it distinguishes Inf'aq from Zakāt, the obligatory right attached to wealth, and from Ṣadaqah understood as a donation pursued for a specific reward or protection. Although the noun infaq is rare, the Qur'an repeatedly commands believers to spend, linking Birr (righteousness) to giving from "what you love," and teaching that ethical giving includes honouring the recipient. The study places Karbala at the centre of this moral imagination: the sacrifice of Al Imam al-Ḥusayn (as) is read as the consummate Inf'aq for the survival of the Kalimah. The Nabawi declaration, "Ḥusayn is from me and I am from Ḥusayn," read with the Qur'ani affirmation that Rasulullah (S) does not speak from desire, frames Ḥusayn's stand as an extension of Nabawi mission and a living Qur'an. Inf'aq, therefore, is not confined to monetary transfers; it includes surrendering wealth, comfort, pride, and even life when Aqidah and human welfare are imperilled. Drawing on Sirah Literature, the paper analyses emblematic instances: Abu Ṭalḥah's dedication of his beloved orchard; Amir al-Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Ṭalib's (as) spending by night and day, secretly and openly; the three nights of charity accepted despite public misunderstanding; and Al Imam al-Ḥasan's (as) safeguarding of a petitioner's dignity while giving all that remained in his house. From these narratives, it extracts governing conditions: sincerity; avoidance of injury, reproach, and ostentation - Riya'; preference for discreet giving except where public benefit requires encouragement; spending from lawful earnings; and hastening charity before death. It requires lawful earnings and timely giving before death, when regret arrives too late. Finally, it outlines the promised dividends and social functions of Inf'aq: purification of intention, relief from hardship and the rigours of death, refinement of character against miserliness, protection on the Day of Judgment, and a reduction of resentment and crime through compassionate redistribution. Inf'aq thus emerges as an intention-driven, dignity-preserving practice capable of restoring moral balance in crisis-stricken economies and rehumanising social relations.*

Keywords: *Inf'aq; Qur'an; Sunnah; Birr; Riya (ostentation); Ahl al-Bayt; Karbala; social justice; dignity of the poor; lawful earnings, Halal.*

Today when the global economy is under severe distress and is witnessing a frightening humanitarian crisis, it is important to discuss the topic of Inf'aq in light of the Qur'an and Sunnah. According to "Hans Wehr", Inf'aq is simply: [1]

"Spending or disbursement."

It means simply to please Allah without asking for any favour. The word Inf'aq is mentioned once in the Qur'an, but the essential form of the verb "Anfiqu" appears 18 times. The word "al-inf'aq" [2] is used with clarity in Surah al-Isra. Inf'aq is totally different from Zak'at, which is obligatory on Muslims, and Sadaqah, which is donation for attaining a specific reward or protection from some adverse episode. It aims to encourage the prosperous to fulfill this responsibility that would increase Hasan'at and save them. Qur'an says: [3]

"You shall not attain righteousness until you spend in the way of Allah 'what you love'; and whatsoever you spend, verily, Allah knows it."

The Arabi term "Birr" has a vast meaning which covers all good deeds irrespective of belief whereas "what you love" indicates all that you hold dear to your heart. The term covers the spending of one's wealth and possessions, and the sacrificing of one's pride as well as the shedding of one's blood for the cause of Islam, especially when the religion of Allah and welfare of human society is in danger. A Muslim never forgets the supreme sacrifice of Moula Abi Abdillah Al Husayn ibn Ali (as) in Karbala for the survival of Kalimah. In fact, it was Rasulullah (S) who manifested himself through his grandson, Sayyed ush Shuhada, Al Imam al-Husayn ibn Ali (as) to prove his divine declaration: [4]

Husayn-un Minnī wa-Anā min Husayn.

Husayn is from me and I am from Husayn.

These are not ordinary words explaining an ordinary relation of a grandfather and a grandson, but are the sayings of that Rasul (S) for whom Qur'an has announced: [5]

"He (Rasulullah) doesn't speak out of desire; it is not but Wahi that appears."

Lets study the complete Hadith and try to understand the Inf'aq of Rasulullah(S) through Husayn (as):

"Husayn is from me, and I am from Husayn. Allah loves whoever loves Husayn. Husayn is a Sibb among the Asb'at."

This Hadith denotes that Rasulullah(S) knew well what will happen with his children after his demise. He knew that Husayn (as) will be slaughtered in Karbala brutally; therefore, he wanted to show his real position as the head of Ahl al-Bayt (as) to those who hated or despised Husayn (as) in the eyes of his Ummah. Through this Hadith Rasulullah (S) declared that Husayn (as) was part of his body, physical as well as spiritual. "He is from me" connotes that Husayn (as) is on Haq and that he will defend my Daw'ah. And "I am from him" signifies each action and declaration of Husayn (as) is according to the Qur'an and my Sunnah. He and I unite in the same line, the line of Islam. He is not separate from me; I am not separate from him. The word "Asb'at" mentioned in the above Hadith is the plural form of the word "Sibb" which means grandchild. The "Inf'aq" of Husayn Ibn Ali (as) at Karbala is in reality the greatest "Inf'aq" of Rasulullah (S) for the Baqa of Kalimah. Therefore, Rasulullah(S) has announced that He and Husayn (as) both are connected to each other through this supreme Inf'aq.

In Sirah Literature hundreds of examples are available which inspire us: [6]

Abu-Talhah al-Ansari (ra) had the largest number of date trees in Madinah when his garden was his most beloved possession. This garden faced Al Masjid al-Nabawi wherein

there was a spring with nourishing water. Sometimes Rasulullah (S) entered that garden and drank from the spring. The garden was so beautiful and splendid with a great income that people often spoke about it. When the above Ayah was sent down, Abu Talhah (ra) went to Rasulullah(S) and said: "The most beloved to me is this garden and I want to give it in the way of Allah."

Rasulullah(S) replied:

"Well done! this is a wealth which will benefit you."

Then Rasulullah (S) continued:

"We have accepted it from you but we return it back to you in order that you give it to your relatives as alms."

And he did so as Rasulullah (S) had ordained.

The Qur'an has instructed in clear terms that affluent Muslims should help the needy and poverty stricken in Ayah 10 of Surah Wad Duha. This duty involves helping to meet the needs of the poor and treating them with proper respect and affection and not disrespecting them or treating them harshly. The Qur'an guides: [7]

"An honorable word with pardon is better than a charity followed by affront. Allah is all-sufficient, most forbearing."

This illustrates that if a person is not able to help someone, for whatever reason, then they must respond to the destitute with kindness. If we are not able to help others financially, we don't have the right to shame them and demean their character.

Sirah of Al Khamsah al-Ath'ar (Muhammad, Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn) (as) [8] is the interpretation of Qur'an - after all they are Qur'an'i Natiq (vocal Qur'an). They were very careful to abide by the principles of generosity and giving all throughout their lives. Once Amir al-Mumineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as) had four Dirham [9]. He divided them into four. He gave away one dirham for the sake of Allah by night and one dirham by day. He gave away the third dirham secretly and the fourth openly. The following Ayah was revealed on the same occasion [10]

"As for those who spend their property by night and by day, secretly and openly, they shall have their reward from their Lord and they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve."

On the above-mentioned narration, Sayyiduna Abdullah ibn Abbas (ra), commenting on the following Ayah: [11]

"Men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of Allah... without measure."

The occasion of the arrival of the Ayah was that one day Rasulullah (S) gave Ali (as) three hundred Dinars, which they had given to him as gift. Ali (as) said: [12]

I took the money and said to myself by Allah that I will give such charity with these Dinars that Allah will accept. When I completed the night Salaat with Rasulullah (S), I took a hundred Dinars and left the Masjid. On my way, I came across a woman to whom I gave one hundred Dinar.

The following day, people said:

"Ali has given assistance to a corrupt woman!"

Ali (as) continued:

It was a great sorrow for me. That night, I performed the Tahajjud Salaat, took a hundred Dinars in my hand, left the Masjid and said to myself, "Wallah! I will give charity which will be accepted by my Lord. I saw a man and gave away the one hundred Dinars to him."

The following day, the people of Madinah accused:

"Ali has given away a hundred Dinar to a thief."

Deeply saddened once again, I convinced myself, "Wallah! I will give such charity tonight that will be accepted by Allah. Accordingly, I performed my Tahajjud Salaat with Rasulullah(S) and then left the Masjid having a hundred Dinars with me. I saw a man to whom I gave the money.

The next day, the natives of Madinah said:

"Last night, Ali gave a hundred Dinar to a rich man."

Again, I was distressed. I went to Rasulullah(S) and told him the story. He said: "O Ali! Jibrael (as) says to you: Allah has accepted your inf'aaq and purified your acts. The one hundred Dinar you gave as inf'aaq was put at the disposal of a corrupt woman who repented and used the money as earnings for her living. She also intends to get married with this money."

The inf'aaq of the second night went to a thief who repented thereafter and used the money for running a business. The inf'aaq of the third night went to a rich man who had not paid alms for years. He went home and blamed himself saying:

"How miserly am I! Amir al-Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) gave away a hundred Dinar to me when he has nothing whereas I am rich who has not paid his obligatory alms!"

Thereafter, he reconsidered his Inf'aaq and put it aside. It was for this reason that the above-mentioned Ayah was revealed.

Moreover, once, a poor man knocked on the door of Al Imam al-Hasan's (as) house and pleaded: [13]

O grandson of Rasulullah(S)! I have nothing left which I can sell and earn money (from) in exchange. The way I look and my condition gives testimony to the truth of my words. At the same time, I have a little bit of dignity left which I have preserved (for the right customer). Now that I have found you as a suitable customer, I am giving it to you!

When the beloved son of Fatimah (as) heard this appeal, he instructed one of his servants to check the amount of funds left. The servant informed that only twelve thousand dirhams were left. The Imam (as) instructed that all of it should be given to this man. Afterwards, he called that person and expressed regret saying: We did not give you your full right, but have given you whatever we had. The Imam (as) responded in poetry what the poor man had recited in regards to selling the last shreds of his dignity:

"Take this small amount as if you have not sold anything and we have not bought something."

Hence, the Imam preserved the honour and dignity of the poor. This Imami behavior is the epitome of Inf'aaq with others, without injuring feelings. The Qur'an teaches: [14]

"O believers! Do not render your charity worthless by reproach and injury, like he who spends his wealth to be seen by men, and does not believe in Allah and the last day"

Whenever you face the underprivileged and are unable to help him, then you must at least speak to him with kindness.

The Qur'an imposes several conditions regarding Inf'aaq:

- i. Inf'aaq should be to seek the pleasure of Allah [15]*
- ii. Inf'aaq in the way of Allah without any injury has reward. [16]*
- iii. Inf'aaq should not be for the purpose of display [17]*
- iv. Inf'aaq done in secrecy is better than if given openly [18]*
- v. Inf'aaq should be out of Halal income [19].*

A Hadith says: [20]

"A time will come when people will not care how one gains money, legally or illegally"
vi. Inf'aq should be given before death [21]

The benefits of monetary Inf'aq are:

vii. At least the same amount which has been spent will be returned. This will be the guaranteed minimum.

viii. The return may be twice the amount given [22]

ix. The return may increase manifold [23]

x. The return may be more than 700 times the initial amount [24]

The benefits of non-monetary Inf'aq:

i. It helps remove the problems of ordinary life and beyond.

A Hadith says: [25]

"Verily charity appeases the wrath of Allah and eases the sufferings of death."

ii. It improves one's character.

A Hadith says: [26]

"There are two habits which are never present together in a believer: miserliness and bad manners."

iii. The giver will obtain divine protection on the Day of Qayamah according to a Hadith:[27]

"A person who gives gifts so secretly that his left hand does not know what his right hand has given."

Inf'aq is one of those rare topics of Fiqh on whose significance all Muslim schools of thought unanimously agree. Simply speaking, the fundamental principle of Inf'aq is that it should be done with the sole intention of earning the pleasure of Allah alone and extreme care should be taken to avoid self-glorification, because advertisement and showcase spoils the reward of Inf'aq. This then can become the source of Az'ab because such activities of "Riya"[28] are extremely unpleasant. Propagation of Inf'aq is allowed only when it is done for the cumulative interest of the society but not with relation of an individual.

For example, when it comes to public welfare projects such as the construction of Masjid, community hall, school, hospital and library, the announcement of Inf'aq is allowed only to encourage and inspire others to contribute to the cause, and in time of a public-crisis when the individual act of Inf'aq might not be sufficient, this might encourage others to contribute. Here Inf'aq can be done openly. However, Inf'aq which is done to help out a single individual should never be disclosed and publicised. Inf'aq done in this manner protects society from an increase in criminal activities because not only the needs of the deprived are taken care off, it also promotes a feeling of goodwill and brotherhood.

Qura'n very emphatically asserts: [29]

"Those who hoard gold and silver (Al-Kanz: the money, the Zakat of which has not been paid), and do not spend (anything out of it) for the cause of Allah, should know that their recompense will be a painful punishment."

Yet like the miserly Hamman, Shaddad, and Nimrood, today's rich have become selfish, and keep on accumulating wealth. They are consuming more and more while the spiritual and

moral quality of their lives keeps on declining. Stinginess is a sign of over attachment to this transient world. It hinders one from decorating oneself with virtues like munificence, altruism and helping others.

It is for this reason that Rasulullah(S) has said: [30]

“No miser shall enter Jannah.”

Amir al-Mumineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as) explained the habit of Jaud which is interlinked with Inf’aq in a verse available in his Diw’an: [31]

“Al Jaudu Zaynun Lil-wara;

Wal Bakhlu Aarun Fil Arab”

*Generosity is decor for the people
whilst miserliness is a blemish in Arabs.*

In another place he says: [32]

“I am suprised to see a miserly man who craves for poverty which he tried to flee from, and fosakes the riches that he yearned for, as he passes his life here like a pauper and stands in hereafter accountable as a wealthy one.”

Conclusion:

Inf’aq is a comprehensive Qur’ani ethic rather than a merely financial gesture: it is Ibadah expressed through responsible redistribution, refined by intention, and guarded by Adab. The Qur’an links true birr to giving from what one loves, thereby challenging attachment to wealth, status, and comfort, while the Sunnah and Sirah demonstrate that the moral worth of giving is defeated when it humiliates the recipient or becomes a vehicle for self-praise. The Karbalā paradigm further establishes that the apex of Inf’aq is principled sacrifice for the protection of faith and human welfare, and that generosity may encompass life, honour, and resolve, not only money. Accordingly, a sound practice of Inf’aq requires: sincerity for Allah alone; avoidance of injury, reproach, and Riya’; preference for secrecy in personal assistance; openness only where public welfare demands mobilisation; scrupulous Halāl sources; and urgency before death closes the door of action. When internalised at the individual and communal levels, Inf’aq softens inequality, preserves dignity, strengthens brotherhood, and restrains the social harms that accompany hoarding and neglect. In a world marked by economic anxiety and humanitarian rupture, reviving Inf’aq on these Qur’ani terms offers a credible pathway to moral renewal and social stability. Furthermore, Islam does not allow anyone to gain at the cost of others, much less at the cost of the entire society. The interests of the society must be prioritized over the interests of the individual. I conclude this discussion on the verses of Sayyiduna Nasir’e Khusraw, one of the foremost poets of the Farsi language and a major Ismaili intellectual and Da’i. Celebrated for his literary prowess that combines art with philosophy, and trusted for his mastery over theological texts, he remains one of the most fascinating figures in Islamic history and literature. Sayyiduna Naşir'e Khusraw teaches in Qasidah 104 that a person may refine his character from mere stone into a lustrous ruby, no simple task, yet one made attainable through virtuous deeds such as infaq: [33]

*Chun sang bodam, hastam emrūz cho Yaqut
chun khak bodam, hastam emruz cho Anbar*

*When I was stone, today I am like a Ruby;
when I was dust, today I am like Anbar.*

*Khorshid tavanad ke konad Yaqut az sang
K-az dast'e Tabaye nashavad niz moghayyar?*

*Can the sun not make ruby out of stone;
a change that the hand of mere nature cannot otherwise achieve?*

Bibliography and Notes:

- 1). Hans Wehr: He was a German Professor of Arabi at the University of Munster from 1957–1974 who published the Arabisches Worterbuch, which was later published in an English edition as a Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic.
- 2). "al-Inf'aaq", Ayah 100: Surah al-Isra-17
- 3). Ayah 92: Surah Ali Imr'an-3
- 4). The above mentioned Hadith was classed as Hasan by at-Tirmidhi and al-Albani. Manaqib, 31; Majmauz-Zawaid, 9/181.
- 5). Ayah 3: Surah al-Najam-53
- 6). Sahih Bukhari, vol. 4, P.395, Kit'ab al-Wasaya, 623, Beirut, Lebanon 1987
- 7). Ayah 263: Surah al-Baqarah-2
- 8). "Al Khamsah al-Ath'ar": Muhammad, Ali, Fatimah, Hasan, Husayn. They are known in Farsi and Urdu as "Panj'e-Tan". The Walayah of these Five is Fard, and Bara'at from their enemies is Wajib, while enmity with them is a confirmed licence to Jahannam. Only they are Ash'ab al Tathir, Ahl al-Kisa, and Salaw'at in Salaat is recited upon them and upon the Imam from the lineage of Moula Abi Abdillah al-Husayn (as).
- 9). Al Manaqib, P. 74, vol. 2
- 10). Ayah 274: Surah al-Baqarah-2
- 11). Ayah 37-38: Surah al-Noor-24
- 12). Tafsir, Sayyiduna Abdullah Ibn Abbas (ra): He was one of the sincere Ash'ab and students of Amir al-Mumineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as). His Tafsir is famous but authenticity of its current version is highly doubtful. Authentic manuscript is not available for study and research. Some primary sources quoted some passages which offer readers valuable insight into the circulation and exchange of popular ideas between Islam, Judaism and Christianity during the formative phase of exegesis of Qur'an.
- 13). Muntahal Aam'al, vol.1, P.162
- 14). Ayah 264: Surah al-Baqarah-2
- 15). Ayah 177: Surah al-Baqarah-2
- 16). Ayah 262: Surah al-Baqarah-2
- 17). Ayah 264: Surah al-Baqarah-2
- 18). Ayah 271: Surah al-Baqarah-2
- 19). Ayah 267: Surah al-Baqarah-2
- 20). Hadith, Bukhari
- 21). Ayah 10: Surah al-Munafiqun-63
- 22). Ayah 54: Surah al-Qasas-28
- 23). Ayah 39: Surah al-Rum-30
- 24). Ayah 261: Surah al-Baqarah-2
- 25). Hadith, Tirmadhi
- 26). Hadith, Tirmadhi
- 27). Hadith, Bukhari

28). "Riya": It means showing off and pretending to do good. According to an Ayah of the Qur'an, offering Salaat to show others is amongst the characteristics of a Munafiq. Riya is Har'am but our politicians and religious leaders both specialize in this Har'am act.

29). Ayah 34: Surah Taubah/Bara'at-9

30). Hadith Maruf

31). Diw'an, Amir al-Mumineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as).

32). Kalam, Amir al-Mumineen, Ali Ibn Abi Talib(as), Nahj al-Balagha

33). Diw'an, Sayyiduna Nasir'e Khusraw (ra), is a collection of poems written and compiled by the great Da'i. He composed most of his poems in the valley of Yumgan, a remote mountainous region in Badakhshan. The Diw'an contains around 11,000 verses, reflecting philosophical, religious, Tawil, Haqaiq and personal themes.

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