**Developing a Charitable Culture**| Âdil Khawfî|

We need to cultivate a charitable culture in Muslim countries and in our Muslim communities. Our culture should be one where people not only contribute money to the needy and to the public welfare, but where they also volunteer their time and skills to improving the quality of life for everyone.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized the need for us to have such a public consciousness and a willingness to do our part to help others and improve our general environment.

Once, he was asked: "What is the best way of expressing Islam?"

He replied: "It is to provide food for those who need it and to greet with peace those whom you know as well as those whom you do not know." [Sahîh al-Bukhârî]

Any positive contribution to society is a form of charity. It is not only the poor who should be the focus of voluntary efforts. There are many ways that volunteering ones time, money, and skills can improve civic life for all.
The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Greeting your brother with a smiling face is charity. Enjoying what is good and forbidding what is wrong is charity. Giving directions to a person who is lost is charity. Giving assistance to a person with weak eyesight is charity. Removing boulders and thorns from the road is charity. Pouring water from your vessel into your brother's is charity. [Sunan al-Tirmidhî (1879) – and authenticated by al-Albânî]
In order to cultivate this consciousness, people need to realize the benefits of giving. These benefits, both worldly and spiritual, have personal and societal dimensions. The value of being a volunteer needs to be emphasized by teachers, intellectuals, and parents. Muslim media sources need to convey this message as well. Imams need to address this topic in the mosques. Writers, artists and speakers must also do their part; in short, everybody who has influence over public opinion.
People will never realize their goals as a community unless a spirit of voluntary work becomes second nature to them.

Here are some practical ways to inculcate these ideas among our communities:

1. Our children should be taught from an early age the skills needed to be able to work well with others. They have to learn how to make accommodations for the sake of working in a team, and be willing to make extra efforts at times.

2. Teenagers, both male and female, should be actively encouraged to engage in volunteer charity work. They should be taught about the value of such work and the positive returns for themselves and for society that come of it. This is the job of schools, Islamic centers, and whatever media and social outlets the Muslims have at their disposal.

3. Schools can do their part by getting students involved in extra-curricular activities that contribute to the broader community. They might team up with local charity groups. They can do things as simply as organizing a neighborhood clean-up, tree planting, or other beautification project.

4. Recognition should be given to outstanding volunteer workers. Their efforts must be kept in the public purview. Articles should be published about them in the local newspapers. They should be recognized not only for their community service, but their personal and career achievements should be highlighted along with the skills that they have.

5. The help of charitable organizations, universities, and colleges, should be enlisted to promote the publishing useful studies and general literature about charitable activities and instilling a volunteer ethos in the community.

6. Courses and seminars should be held to teach people about various relevant and rewarding opportunities for volunteer work. Schools and colleges are excellent places for such programs.

7. Individuals can play an important role by supporting volunteer and charitable organizations. This helps those organizations carry out their efforts and provide opportunities for people who wish to effectively contribute their skills to the public good.

**Voluntary Relief Work & the Benefits of Getting Involved**

| Sheikh Walîd b. `Alî al-Husayyin, professor at al-Qasîm University|

  Involvement in relief work is a rewarding experience for the Muslim volunteer. It realizes for the volunteer a number of Islamic as well as personal objectives. In this article, we will be highlighting some of the most important opportunities and benefits that carrying out relief works provides for us as Muslims.

Receiving Allah’s Blessings and Rewards

A person can attain Allah’s blessings and rewards for every good work that he is involved in, as long as he makes his intention that he is doing so seeking Allah’s pleasure. When a Muslim engages in relief work, he is doing good for others by fulfilling their needs.

There are numerous verses in the Qur’ân, as well as the hadîth of the Prophet (peace be upon him), that attest to the virtue of this work.

Allah says: “Help one another in righteousness and piety.” [Sûrah al-Mâ’idah: 2]

Allah also says: “And whoever does good voluntarily, then surely Allah is grateful, knowing.” [Sûrah al-Baqarah: 158]

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: “Allah will not cease to help His servant as long as that servant is helping his brother.” [Sahîh Muslim (2699)]

He also said: “Whoever is working to fulfill his brother’s need, know that Allah will be taking care of his needs.” [Sahîh al-Bukhârî (2442) and Sahîh Muslim (2580)]

These words should be more than sufficient to inspire us to become more charitable.

2. Direct Involvement in Fulfilling the Needs of Society

Relief works gets the Muslims involved in the dynamics of fulfilling society’s needs. In this way, the values of cooperation, love, and civic loyalty are cultivated. Social harmony is achieved. The spirit of brotherhood is fostered.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “The believers are, to each other, like a building, each part supporting the rest.” [Sahîh al-Bukhârî (481) and Sahîh Muslim (2585)]

3. The Rewards of Personal Satisfaction

Helping other people brings happiness to the heart. There is nothing like the satisfaction that one feels when he sees the joy that he has brought to the lives of others or when he sees that his efforts have removed their hardship and put an end to their despair.

Engaging in unselfish work purifies our souls. It makes us love the good fortune of others and allows us to share in their joys. We then truly love for others what we love for ourselves.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) has told us: “None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother – or his neighbor – what he loves for himself.” [Sahîh al-Bukhârî (12) and Sahîh Muslim (64)]

4. Warding Off Affliction and Hardship

Helping others is a means by which Allah keeps hardship and affliction from befalling ourselves. It is a means by which Allah brings to us prosperity and good fortune.

5. Awakening Latent Strengths and Learning Skills that Society Has to Offer

A person who engages in voluntary relief work develops new strengths and learns new practical skills. He develops expertise that he otherwise would not even be acquainted with. He also strengthens his people skills.

6. Making New Friends and Acquaintances

Volunteer work is a great way to meet new people. It provides opportunities to get to know people from different backgrounds and different walks of life.

7. Self-Empowerment

Involvement in relief work makes a person realize that he can make a change. He can have a positive affect on society. This work gives a real sense of the truly important place that the individual has in his community and in the world at large.