The Turkish–Islamic Culture of Giving*

In order to understand the impetus and motivation behind the service commitment and financial support on the part of millions of Turkish people for the Gülen movement, it is necessary to understand certain cultural-religious practices related to philanthropy and charity in Turkish history. It is clear that the movement started in Turkey and that its activities are organized predominantly by Turkish citizens and by Turks in the diaspora around the world. Numerous scholars have concluded, for better or for worse, that the movement is inherently tied to Turkish culture and a specifically Turkish understanding of Islam.[1] Other scholars have aptly described it as a movement "witnessing [to] tradition in the modern age," and that it is Turkish Islam that is at the heart of the tradition.[2] It is impossible, therefore, to analyze what motivates Turkish people to give so generously to the activities of the movement without understanding concepts of giving and hospitality that are inherent in Turkish culture.

One of the aspects of the Gülen movement that has been discussed in recent media without sufficient attention to the cultural-historical context has been the issue of how the movement finances its plethora of institutions and activities. In addition to some limited scholarly investigations of this issue,[3] some Turkish and international newspapers, magazines, television stations and blog spots have printed and/or broadcast a number of accusations about the movement's financial sources. Underlying allegations that the movement has received aid from such contradictory foreign sources as the CIA, Mossad, the Vatican, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Russian Federation, are political and ideological opponents' presumptions that the many individuals who support the movement's institutions and activities, both financially and through volunteering or official association, are motivated by intent

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[1] Yavuz and Esposito (2003); Park (2007); Fuller (2008).

[2] Ozdalga (2000); Michel (2005); Ergene (2007).

[3] Ebaugh and Koç (2007); Kalyoncu (2008).

H.R. Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam*, DOI 10.1007/978-1-4020-9894-9_5,

to gain political power and/or convert the nation/world to radical Islam or Catholicism. However, our interview data show that almost all supporters of the movement, be they Turkish-Muslim participants or non-Turkish, non-Muslim sympathizers, are motivated by a genuine philanthropic urge to give. Graham Fuller, former vice chairman of the National Intelligence Council at the CIA, political scientist for the RAND Corporation, and expert on both the Middle East and the Muslim world, explains, for example, that the number of Gülen-inspired schools is ever expanding thanks to the generosity of wealthy businessmen who see such work not only as a form of *zekat* (alms-giving as a means of assisting the less fortunate and reducing economic inequality), but also as the realization of *ihsan*, the deeper spiritual motivation to put one's faith in action for the purpose of perfecting spiritual excellence by "doing beautiful things." He says further that:

> …the Gülen movement has launched a flag-ship program that has built a network of hundreds of schools. Funding comes from within the community and from wealthy businessmen for whom building a school has become the modern pious equivalent of building a mosque.[4]

Fuller's explanation of why Turkish-Muslim businessmen are so eager to fund the movement's educational initiatives relies on specifically Islamic concepts. Hence, a brief exploration of the culture of giving and hospitality in Turkey, in particular, and in Islam in general, will shed light on issues related to the Gülen movement's activities, its financial sources, and the motivations of the many people who contribute to the movement in various ways. The most important element in any altruistic social movement, including the Gülen movement, is the desire of its members to give of their time, money, and energy without expecting a material gain in return. In this chapter, we demonstrate that some of the key elements that define and determine the characteristics of the Gülen movement, such as belief in and practice of virtues like self-sacrifice, charity and philanthropy, are deeply rooted in Turkish–Islamic culture.

The values of giving and showing hospitality have deep historical roots in Turkish culture. Traditions related to generosity, hospitality and charity can be traced back to the central Asian civilizations from which Turks hail. Nomadic Turks living in central Asia accepted Islam in the ninth and tenth centuries. Among the various reasons for these Turks' ready acceptance of Islam is the existence of many similarities between their pre-Islamic lifestyles, values and ethics and those that Islam prescribes. Most certainly, Islam strengthened, institutionalized and added a spiritual dimension to pre-Islamic Turkish culture in addition to discontinuing some undesirable practices – just as occurred in other major religions' interaction with local cultures.

Some habits, practices and traditions which are usually attributed to Islam might very well have been inherited from pre-Islamic Turkish culture. However, since Islam introduced very similar customs and traditions, it is difficult to tell which ones

[4]Fuller (2008).

come from Islam and which ones come from Turkish culture. Considering the high likelihood that most Islamic and pre-Islamic Turkish traditions related to giving and hospitality overlap, we will treat them as an inherent part of "Turkish culture" for the rest of the chapter. We should also point out the fact that the worldviews and practices of certain religious orders (for example, the Mawlawīyah Sufi Order of Konya) and their cultural-religious products (for example, Mawlānā Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī's six-volume poem, the *Mathnawīye Ma'nawī*) have both crystallized and become identical with the cultural norms of the region in such a way that is impossible to distinguish one from the other.

One of the most important sources of early Turkish history is a text called the *Dede Korkut* stories, accounts which are set in the heroic age of Oghuz Turks in the eighth century A.D. These epic legends document the transition of Turkish clans from a shamanist to a Muslim society, as well as the continuance of a distinguished culture of hospitality and giving. For example, along with accounts of Oghuz Turks drinking alcohol and eating horse meat, which are not common habits among Muslims today, we find a narrator's description of a man performing the call to prayer (*ezan*) – "when the long-bearded Persian recites the call to prayer," an act which strongly indicates that the new religion was not yet completely accepted as an inherent element of Turkish society. These same stories also elaborately describe social gatherings and invitations to gatherings, at which either the head of the clan or the head of the household organizes a great feast and distributes plentiful gifts to the guests. Indeed, pre-Islamic Turks designated numerous occasions for feast-giving, such as births, weddings, name-giving ceremonies, clan members' return from a foreign land, wish-making rituals, and deaths. Among the ancient Turkish practices still alive in contemporary Turkey are wedding feasts, family visits to request a girl's hand in marriage, and the slaying of an animal (i.e. a feast) for guests.

Today Turkish society is known for its **hospitality (*misafirperverlik*).** Routinely, people who visit the country attest to the warmth of Turkish hospitality. The author of *Tradition and Change in a Turkish Town* explains this phenomenon as follows:

> The importance of hospitality and generosity among Turks and other Middle Easterners is difficult to exaggerate. Any Middle Easterner who enjoys a reputation for these two virtues is respected and admired by members of his community. Guests in a Turkish home must be treated like royalty. They are offered the best places; food and drink, everyone in the household turns his full attention to their comfort. […]In return, guests must be extremely polite and grateful. One of the most appreciated forms of thanks they can offer is the phrase: "May Allah accept you[r efforts]," denoting that generosity and hospitality are pious virtues.[5]

In numerous anthropological works, Turkish hospitality is taken for granted, and interestingly, little attention has been paid to the reasons behind society members' overwhelmingly positive attitude toward guests and the duties of hospitality.[6]

[5] Magnarella (1974).

[6] See, for example, Piece (1964), Magnarella (1974), and Delaney (1991). These authors are appreciative of Turkish hospitality, but they provide little explanation for it.

Although the forms of Turkish hospitality are changing in industrialized and urbanized areas, due to changing work habits and demographics, hospitality is still easily observed. The many expressions and beliefs maintaining and encouraging the culture of hospitality in contemporary Turkey have their roots in Islam, but also in pre-Islamic nomadic culture.

The *Dede Korkut* stories, for example, provide many examples of Turkish hospitality. When a clan member dies, relatives slaughter his horses and give a funeral feast. When the leaders in society are about to make a decision or announcement that will affect everyone, they invite their tribes' members to a lavish feast and let them loot the table, including the plates. Some stories contain references condemning or at least belittling the houses or tents that do not receive guests. Dede Korkut, the sage and holy man of clan society at that time, states: "The black tents to which no guest comes would be better destroyed." In these stories, it is believed that if one feeds the poor, pleases guests, or gives a big feast, one's wishes will come true. The following is the advice of a wife whose husband wants a child, but has not been able to sire one for many years:

> Rise and bestir yourself, have the tents of many colors
> Set up on the earth's face. Have your man slaughter
> Of horses the stallions, of camels the males, of sheep the rams.
> Gather round you the nobles of Inner Oghuz and Outer Oghuz
> When you see the hungry, fill him;
> When you see the naked, clothe him;
> Save the debtor from his debt.
> Heap up meat in hillocks; let lakes of kumis be drawn
> Make an enormous feast, and ask what you want and let them pray
> So, with prayerful mouths singing your praises,
> God may grant us a fine hefty child.[7]

Other expressions and practices of hospitality might also be remnants of pre-Islamic culture, even though Islam supports a similar approach. For instance, if a stranger knocks at the door, s/he should be invited inside, given ample food and shelter for three days; and only at the end of three days should the cause of the visit be asked. This time frame of three days is specified both by oral Turkish folklore, common proverbs,[8] and by various oral traditions

[7]Dede Korkut (1974).

[8]See, for example, the Turkish proverb, "A guest is a guest for three days," also known as "Guesthood lasts three days." This proverb indicates that a three day stay is acceptable for both parties, and that staying longer may involve a burden on the host, unless the guest begins helping with the household chores like a family member.

about the life, speech and practices (hadiths) of the Prophet Muhammad. Moreover, Turks call a guest who arrives without prior knowledge of the host "a guest from God" (*Tanrı misafiri*).

The peculiar usage of the Turkish word *Tanrı*, rather than Arabic or Persian, indicates the possibility that the name for an unexpected guest hails from the pre-Islamic period. Indeed, when the narrator of *Dede Korkut* classifies women into three categories and describes their respective features, he praises most the type of woman who hosts and feeds the guest, even if her husband is not at home. This practice was later approved by religion – albeit with some restrictions concerning physical divisions of space in the home, and men's and women's clothing, speech and behavior while in mixed company – and has continued to exist as part of Turkish culture to this day.

However, it is also possible that the expression derives from a Qur'anic reference to the Prophet Abraham's hospitable reception of three "unknown" guests, who turned out to be the Archangel Gabriel and two other angels, bringing him the glad tidings of a son to be born to his wife, Sarah, and warning him of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, save for his nephew Lot and a handful of believers. The religious motivation for graciously accepting unexpected guests, travelers, or even strangers at one's door is also expressed in a rhyming proverb, which says that "one has to consider every night a Night of Power, and every arriving person, Khizr." ("*Her geceyi Kadir, her geleni de Hızır bil*"). This proverb makes reference to the personality of Khizr, a Muslim saint or prophet believed to appear in time of need, who has been granted special knowledge of the Unseen, and whose spirit has been known to appear to pious individuals on earth; hence, Turks are encouraged to treat strangers who knock on their doors as well as they would treat a visiting saint. The proverb also suggests that hospitality in everyday life is as important as spiritual readiness for the Night of Power, an unspecified night in the latter half of Ramadan which is considered "more valuable than one thousand months," as expressed in the Qur'an (97:3).

There are other specifically Islamic concepts and practices of giving which quickly took root in ancient Turkish culture, migrated with nomadic Turks across the steppes of central Asia to Anatolia, and later entered northern Africa and the Balkans under the auspices of the Ottoman Empire. Certain acts of giving prescribed by the Qur'an and encouraged by the Prophet Muhammad (570–632 A.D.) have found almost continuous cultural translation in pre-Ottoman, Ottoman and modern Turkish society. The major concepts to be discussed are: ***sadaka***, ***zekat***, ***kurban***, ***vakıf***, ***ahilik***, ***bereket***, ***komşuluk*** and ***karz-i hasen***. In this context, we will also examine the sociolinguistic significance of common Turkish idioms and proverbs related to giving, hospitality and neighborliness. Finally, we will briefly suggest ways in which the ideals, activities and discourse of the Gülen movement have provided a new outlet for individual and group expression of Turkish-Islamic traditions related to giving.

Major Concepts in Turkish Culture Related to Giving

Sadaka

One of the most important prophetic practices that encourages Turks to give is ***sadaka*****,** a term which can be translated as "charity," "alms" or "a charitable gift which is given with the sole intention of pleasing God and in expectation of a reward in the Hereafter (i.e. without calculation of any worldly gain, such as fame, power or societal recognition).[9] The recipients of *sadaka* are not obliged to be members of any particular religion. Anyone who needs charity can receive a donation. Although *sadaka* is usually interpreted as something tangible or monetary, hadiths relate that any favor given, even the act of smiling at a fellow Muslim, can be considered a *sadaka*, with its giver promised a spiritual reward. Hence, people can offer money, food, water, clothes, books, professional expertise or their time as *sadaka*. References to *sadaka* in various hadiths stress, in particular, the excellence of alms given under one or another circumstance: for example, *sadaka* given to close neighbors and relatives, *sadaka* given on Fridays or during Ramadan, *sadaka* given in Makkah, Madinah or Jerusalem, *sadaka* given in secret, and *sadaka* involving self-sacrifice are said to be particularly meritorious.[10]

Giving *sadaka* has remained a widespread practice in modern Turkish culture, whether individuals define themselves as religious or not. In Ottoman times, *sadaka* was given on many occasions and placed anonymously either in the mosque collection box, on a "*sadaka* stone" outside the mosque or in the street, or in the hand of a representative of a *vakıf* (charitable trust) or the local government, both of which ran soup kitchens (*aşevleri*) open to the public. These practices assured that individuals in need of charity could easily take what they needed without sacrificing their family honor or personal dignity.[11] Most Ottoman Turks subscribed to the Islamic belief that a *sadaka* given sincerely helps a Muslim to ward off trouble in this world, makes his/her interrogation in the grave easier, and serves to elevate one's status in the Hereafter.[12] Even though the westernization movement, which began in the Tanzimat Period and gained almost irresistible force during the early years of the Turkish Republic, introduced secular and nationalist values into every area of life in a "top down" manner, it can be argued that what was introduced

[9]Interestingly, the Arabic word for charity, *sadaqah*, derives from *sidq*, meaning truth.

[10]For more detailed information on the hadiths referencing sadaka, see the "Sadaka" entry in *The Encyclopedia of Islam,* Vol 26.

[11]For more information about the practice of *sadaka* during Ottoman times, see historical lectures by Dr. Talha Uğurluel (televised regularly by Samanyolu TV) or lectures/works by renowned historian Dr. İlber Ortaylı.

[12]These ideas have been explained by scholars like İbrahim Hakkı, whose works have played an important role in helping today's Turks to understand and practice their religion. Ibrahim Hakkı, Ruhul Beyan, Istanbul: 1928.

presented no real alternative to Islam, which had provided Anatolians with identity and organizing principles of life for so long. Richard Tapper[13] says, "At the public level, it was no substitute for the divine laws of Islam; at the individual level, it could not meet the intellectual needs for an ethics and eschatology." Hence, many Islamic practices, like *sadaka*, have survived into the modern period.

In modern Turkish society, *sadaka* is given on many occasions, albeit in perhaps a less consciously religious manner by some individuals. The most common occasions for giving *sadaka* (via the collection box in one's local mosque, the timely sacrifice of a ram or cow (*kurban*) and the distribution of its meat to the poor, or an electronic transfer of funds to a charity organization) are: before a young couple has a baby or after the baby is born; before taking a trip or after completing the trip; before starting a project and after the completion of the project; after having a bad dream and in order to prevent malicious interpretation of the dream; before families marry off their children and after a wedding ceremony; when parents hear the news that their children are expecting a baby and after the baby is born; before they send their sons to do military service and after the son returns from service. More religiously minded Turks might keep a *sadaka* box near the entrance of their home and deposit loose change into it every time they go out. They might also give *sadaka* to atone for a sin or to express thankfulness to God for having been spared from a great disaster. *Sadaka* is given by people who are alive as well as in the name of those who are deceased. A prophetic tradition that will be discussed extensively in the section on *vakıflar* (charitable trusts) encourages the offspring of a deceased person to give *sadaka*. For this reason, children of the deceased often look for an occasion to give *sadaka* in order to please not only God, but also the spirits of their fathers, mothers or loved ones.

Zekat

Although *sadaka* is a voluntary payment or contribution, most Turks recognize a religiously institutionalized and mandatory form of it called ***zekat***. *Zekat* is the obligatory payment of a certain portion (1/40th) of one's total wealth – if one possesses more capital or property than what is absolutely necessary to maintain the livelihood of one's family – to the poor once a year. This giving away of lawfully earned wealth to the needy is regarded as bringing about its purification and increase, as charity is likened in the Qur'an to the sowing of seed which brings immense reward:

> The parable of those who spend their wealth in God's cause is like that of a grain that sprouts seven ears, and in every ear, there are a hundred grains. God multiplies for whom He wills. God is All-Embracing (with His Mercy), All-Knowing. (2:261).

[13] Tapper (1991).

The Turkish understanding of Islam generally corresponds to the Sunni interpretation of Islam, which stipulates that every Muslim who is able to fulfill the five tenets of Islam. Along with verbally testifying, "I witness that there is no god but God, and Muhammad is his servant and prophet," praying five times a day, fasting, and making the pilgrimage to Mecca, *zekat* is an important tenet for those believers who qualify economically. References in the Qur'an make *zekat* a mandatory act for many Muslims. *Zekat* cannot be considered a voluntary act of giving because it is part of the tenets of Islam; and a person does not have the right not to give if he/she qualifies economically. According to the Qur'an and many hadiths, the recipients of *zekat*, ie. the poor, have a natural and inherent right to it; and in giving *zekat*, the payer is simply fulfilling his/her religious duty, rather than doing something extra. In Islamic literature, *zekat* is recognized as an important means of redistributing wealth among the members of society, and for the role it plays in preventing certain social ills exacerbated by poverty, such as theft and prostitution. Indeed, regular alms-giving for the benefit of the poor is known to contribute to the harmony and prosperity of societies. *Zekat*, ideally, should cement relationships between various sectors of the community and provide stability. It should cultivate a civic spirit, solve social problems, and foster bonds of love and friendship between members of society.[14] Qur'anic verses which deem *zekat* a mandatory act, threaten those Muslims who are not willing to pay it with Hell-fire.[15]

Two Quranic verses (2:117 and 9:60) provide a detailed list of the sort of people who could be *zekat* recipients: needy relatives and neighbors, orphans, the poor and destitute, those who are burdened by debts, travelers experiencing hardship, slaves or captives in need of emancipation, *zekat* collectors (who were themselves among the needy), and those "whose hearts" are to be "won over" to God's cause. Later, Muslim jurists developed groups or subgroups under these categories and expanded the number of people who could receive charity through *zekat*. As a result, the general rule for giving *zekat* is to start from the center (i.e., with those people closest to oneself) and extend to the periphery. In other words, an obliged Muslim should give *zekat* first to needy relatives and neighbors, and then, only if there are no eligible recipients in these two categories, to other needy people. Also, local distribution of *zekat* is preferred to national or regional distribution.

Another form of mandatory *zekat* or *sadaka* is *sadaka-yı fıtır*, giving that is due at the end of Ramadan each year. *Sadaka-yı fıtır* is usually between $10 and $25, or the amount of money needed to feed a needy person for one day.[16] Unlike *zekat*, which is an obligation for Muslims of a certain age and economic status, *sadaka-yı*

[14] Karakaş (2002).

[15] See, for example, this Qur'anic verse: "Let not those who are niggardly with what God has granted them out of His bounty think that it is good for them: rather, it is bad for them. What they are niggardly with, they will have it hung about their necks on the Day of Resurrection. (Why are they niggardly, seeing that to God belongs the absolute ownership of the heavens and the earth?) And He will inherit them in the end. And God is fully aware of all that you do." (3:180).

[16] In the past, sacks of grain, dates or grapes were also considered valid *sadaka-yı fıtır.*

fıtır should be paid by every single member of the family who is economically able. *Sadaka-yı fıtır* is viewed as a means of "evening the scales" to allow poor members of society to celebrate *Eid-ul-Fitr*, a major holiday at the end of the month of Ramadan.

In early Islamic history, *zekat* was collected by the state, in the form of a tax. In later centuries, it seems to have been collected rigorously at times, while at other times individuals paid it if they so chose. Even under such highly bureaucratized administrations as the Ottoman (mid-thirteenth to early twenteeth centuries), there does not seem to have been a formal method of wealth assessment for *zekat*, so that the amount paid would have been a matter of personal conscience.[17] In the early twentieth century, as the Islamic caliphate gave way to colonized or semi-colonized nation-states, and many governments gave up collecting *zekat* in favor of westernized tax systems, the decision of whether or not individual citizens should pay *zekat* was officially left to them. In Turkey, when nationalist/secularist initiatives disassembled many Islamic institutions in the 1930s, the Turkish Aeronautical Association (*Türk Hava Kurumu* founded in 1925) was designated as a non-profit organization to which citizens could pay *zekat*. Out of concern that this organization might not adhere closely to religious stipulations, other budding civic organizations also began to assume the task of collecting and distributing *zekat*. Indeed, in contemporary Turkey, *zekat* has become a very important financial source for non-governmental charity organizations and civil society, in general.

One important component of giving *sadaka*, *zekat* or *sadaka-yı fıtır* is secrecy. Prophetic tradition states that "the left hand should not see what the right hand spends," which means that *sadaka* or *zekat* should be given in total secrecy. Considering the small and close-knit society in which the Prophet Muhammad lived, as well as the nature of many societies' town and village life, the honor and dignity of the people who receive *sadaka* from the very same people with whom they live, work and socialize, this principle becomes very important. A well-known Turkish proverb also reflects the religious motivation to do good deeds in secret: "Do goodness and throw it into the sea. If fish do not appreciate it, for sure the Creator will" ("*Şyilik yap*, *denize at; balık bilmese Halık bilir*"). There are, however, cases in which *sadaka* or fundraising for the benefit of the poor has been done openly, and wealthy people have been encouraged to give even more. One famous example in Islamic history is the fundraising done by the Prophet Muhammad in Madinah. When the newly growing Muslim community needed money, Prophet Muhammad asked his companions to go to their homes and bring back some money. Umar ibn Al-Khattab, who would later become the second caliph, brought half of what he had; and Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, who later became the first caliph, brought all of his wealth. When Abu Bakr was asked what he had left for his family, he answered, "I left them God and His Messenger. Even though 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab is said to have then understood that he could never outdo Abu Bakr

[17] McChesney (1995).

As-Siddiq in terms of loyalty to the Islamic cause, both men continue to serve as Muslim models of generosity to this day.

Other Turkish–Islamic traditions related to giving and charity practiced during the holy month of Ramadan and the two major holidays, *Eid-ul Fitr* (Ramazan Bayramı) and *Eid-ul Adha* (*Kurban Bayramı*), may also be discussed within the context of *sadaka* and *zekat*. During Ramadan, one of the many ways in which a believer can earn merit in God's sight is to invite guests to one's home for *iftar*, the fast-breaking meal at sunset, or for *sahur*, the early morning meal before the fast begins. In Ottoman times, this custom developed new intricacies, as generous hosts sought to please their guests, not only by feeding them a dizzying array of delicious dishes, but also by offering them small gifts, known as *diş kirası*, in an attempt to win over their hearts and prayers. Beyond the family, Ottoman *vakıflar* (*philanthropic trusts*) and local government agencies held public *iftars* outdoors, ensuring that both the poor and rich alike could break their fasts. Today, the tradition of "fast-breaking tents" (*iftar çadırları*), free and open to the public, has been revived by Turkey's municipal governors, who view such charitable, democratic events as mutually beneficial for the rich and poor. During *Eid-ul Fitr*, also known as "*Ramazan Bayramı*" ("Ramadan Holiday"), even Turks who do not pay *zekat* or *sadaka-yı fıtır* make an effort to give small gifts of candy and money to all the children they know or see while paying visits to relatives, friends and neighbors.

Kurban

During *Eid-ul Adha*, also known as "*Kurban Bayramı*" or "Feast of the Sacrifice," most Turkish Muslims, like Muslims worldwide, offer sacrifices in the form of farm animals such as sheep or cattle, in commemoration of the willingness of the Prophet Abraham to sacrifice his son as an act of obedience to God, and in commemoration of the generosity with which God accepted his sincere intent, instructing him to sacrifice a ram instead (Qur'an 37:102–107). This second major Islamic holiday coincides with the day after the pilgrims conduct hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. The day is the source of a number of strong cultural traditions related to giving and charity. For example, most Turks who sacrifice an animal act in accordance with the Quran (22:28, 34–37) and Prophetic tradition, dividing the meat into three shares: one share for the poor (i.e. *sadaka*), one share for relatives and neighbors, and the last for themselves. In recognition that a large portion of the meat must be given to poor and hungry people so that they can all join in the feast, many Turks donate all or most of their meat, as well as the animal skins and bones, to civic organizations responsible for distribution. The remainder is cooked for the family celebration meal which relatives and friends are invited to share. The regular charitable practices of Turkish Muslims are demonstrated during *Eid ul-Adha* by the concerted effort to see that no impoverished person is left without sacrificial food, and that no close relatives, especially elderly relatives, and friends are left unvisited during these days.

Turks' inclination to sacrifice a farm animal in the name of God (*bismillah*) and distribute the meat to the poor (i.e. give *sadaka*) after a baby is born and its first tress of hair is cut, is the continuation of a pre-Islamic custom on the Arabian peninsula. This tradition, called *akide*, was approved and institutionalized by the Prophet Muhammad during the early years of Islam. It is also common for Turks to make a *sadaka* of sacrificial meat upon opening a new business or upon any of the occasions listed above, in which monetary *sadaka* is given.

Vakıf

Another important institution that reflects the culture of giving in Turkish culture is the ***vakıf*** (charitable trust). Charitable trusts had their golden age in Turkish culture during the Ottoman period (1299–1920) and can be called the *par excellence* of giving. The Arabic term *waqf* can be translated as "common law trust" or "endowed free will offering." In order to establish an inalienable religious endowment, an adult who was of sound mind, who was capable of handling financial affairs, who was not under interdiction for bankruptcy, and who intended to perform a pious deed, would declare part or all of his or her property, typically a building or a plot of land, to be a *vakıf*, i.e. devoted to Muslim religious or charitable purposes. Generally, this decision was irrevocable. In order to secure the *vakıf*, the individual who declared it would then go to court and attempt to repossess the property, whereupon the court would issue a statement that the property is a *vakıf* and cannot be returned, sold or donated. Establishment of a *vakıf* also included the formal designation of beneficiaries (i.e. family members, a particular segment of the public, and/or public utilities) and appointment of a trustee or board of trustees (*mutevelli*), who would manage the *vakıf* according to the original purpose and laws by which it was established. These trustees possessed the right to make changes as long as these were in accordance with Islamic law and to the benefit of the foundation; in other cases, permission from a judge had to be sought. Improper management of a *vakıf*, especially improper use of its funds, was regarded as a sin. Although some scholars believe that early Islamic endowments were modeled after those of Christians and Zoroastrians, with whom Arab Muslims came in contact in the seventh century,[18] virtually all Turks ascribe an Islamic origin to the establishment.

Although *waqfs* are not mentioned specifically in the Qur'an, numerous prophetic traditions encourage their establishment. In the Islamic legal view, the institution originated when Umar ibn al-Khattab acquired land in the oasis of Khaybar near Mecca. He asked the Prophet whether he should give the land away as a voluntary donation (*sadaka*) and the Prophet is reported to have replied, "Encumber

[18] McChesney (1995).

the thing itself and devote its fruits to pious purposes." Umar reportedly did this with the provision that the land should neither be sold nor inherited, and he dedicated its income for a variety of charitable purposes – for the manumission of slaves, for travelers, for guests and "in the way of God."[19] Another famous hadith recounts: "The Messenger of God said: When a man dies, only three deeds will survive him: continuing alms, profitable knowledge and a child praying for him."[20] Whereas the second of these items, "profitable knowledge" was interpreted as production of a book or a successive line of students, the first item, "continuing alms" was interpreted as the continuance of a charitable trust.

Charitable trusts reached their peak in Ottoman society. Wealthy, pious men and women designated huge plots of land and whole buildings, as well as smaller plots of land, single houses and even single rooms as *vakıf*. There were also cases in which a single carpet or rug was declared a *vakıf* for a particular school or mosque, or in which libraries or single books were declared as *vakıf* and presented to the public for common use. Charitable trusts were widespread, not only among Muslims, but also among Christians and Jews living under Ottoman rule. In large cities, in government centers, and even in provincial towns, hundreds of charitable trusts were established for various purposes. Some *vakıfs* addressed the needs of animals: helping weak birds unable to migrate to warmer lands, hatching chickens in ovens, taking care of stray cats and dogs, and providing veterinary services. Other *vakıfs* were dedicated to the needs of individuals or groups of people. As both people and public utilities could be the beneficiaries of a charitable trust, endowments were established for the construction and maintenance of roads, schools, mosques, water utilities, public baths, bridges, graveyards and drinking fountains, as well as for the financial support of students, widows, orphans, and the poor of designated neighborhoods. Muslims, as well as Christians and Jews, could establish and take advantage of the benefits of such trusts. Especially in the Balkans, where the population was predominately Christian in the early years of Ottoman rule, charitable trusts played an important role in performing civic functions and helping the weak and needy in the region, thereby securing the admiration and sympathy of the local population.

In essence, charitable trusts provided many services that modern state and local governments provide, such as provision of health care and elementary education, road maintenance, and distribution of clean water to towns and cities. In addition to serving the poor and needy, *vakıf* also increased public respect for the rich who had established the endowments. In short, the existence of *vakıf* promoted social harmony and reduced the gap between rich and poor.

The *vakıf* tradition continued vigorously from the twelfth century to the nineteenth century, serving many positive functions in Ottoman society. In 1910, the Young Turks replaced them with Chambers of Commerce; and in 1920, they were

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[19] Ibn Had j ar al-Askalānī, Bulūg h al-marām, Cairo n.d., no. 784. In: "WaÐf", *Encyclopedia of Islam* (*EI-2*).

[20] ibid., no. 783.

brought under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Charitable Trusts which was then changed to a General Directorship of Charitable Trusts in 1924. The general directorship continues to oversee some 41,000 charitable trusts remaining from Ottoman times and owns one of the largest banks in the country, Vakıf Bank, which employs more than 38,000 people.[21] Today in Turkey, many types of charitable trusts exist. Some provide funds for restoration and preservation of the country's countless historical sites, while others provide financial, educational, cultural and/or health services to the public. Today's *vakıfs* are also complemented by a plethora of charitable organizations and associations whose activities are often similar, even though their financial and legal structures differ.

Comparatively speaking, institutionalized forms of philanthropy, such as the *vakıf*, are easier to trace than informal forms of philanthropy, such as *sadaka*, due to the practices and contributions of *vakıf* institutions, which typically leave a paper trail of legal documents.

Ahi Organizations

In addition to *vakıflar*, ***Ahi*** organizations are also examples of charitable giving. *Ahi* organizations are social, professional, religious groupings that appeared in Anatolia in the thirteenth century and played an important role in the foundation of the Ottoman Empire. *Ahi* organizations are related to *futuwwa* or *fityan* which are various movements and organizations which, until the beginning of the modern era, were widespread throughout all the urban communities of the Muslim east."[22] They were a form of chivalry with two important elements, their connection with Sufism and their professional dimensions. As a professional grouping, they were linked to Ahi Evran (d.1262) who is considered to be the patron saint of tanners. There were various trade organizations in Turkey but the tanners became the prominent umbrella organization due to their centralized location and firm organizational structure. The representative of Ahi Evran lived in Kirsehir in central Turkey and accepted people into the profession. The symbolic entrance ceremony involved girding the candidate, thereby approving his qualification to be a member of the profession. Later, the head of the tanners in Kirsehir became the head of all the professions with the support of the Sultan, who benefited from the contributions of *Ahi* organizations during both war and peace. During war time some *Ahi* organizations produced manpower for the army and made guns. During peace time, *Ahi* organizations contributed to the material and social betterment of society.

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[21] For more information, see: www.tr.wikipedia.org/vakiflargenel mudurlugu (11.05.2008), http://www.vakifbank.com.tr/vakifbank-tarihcesi.aspx or http://www.diyanet-sen.org.tr/article.php?article_id=8. (accessed 11.05.2008).

[22] Cahen C. "Futuwwa." *Encyclopedia of Islam* (*EI-2*).

Although *Ahis* never had independent political power, they played roles which the state would normally undertake, such as defending the cities and towns against Mongol invasion. In some instances, they played an intermediary role between the state and the masses.[23] These organizations were, in a sense, the equivalent of modern trade associations with a moral and spiritual dimension. They did not consider themselves to be only producers or artisans but also leaders responsible for the wellbeing of the community, both materially and socially. The members of these organizations were expected to display the following qualities: loyalty, trustworthiness, generosity, justice, modesty, helpfulness to their fellow professionals and willingness to forgive.

Bereket

Another important concept that is part of Turkish–Islamic philanthropy is the concept of ***bereket.*** The word means "beneficial force, of divine origin, which causes superabundance in the physical sphere and prosperity and happiness in the psychic order."[24] The word "*bereket*" has become an integral part of Turkish culture and is used in everyday Turkish. Indeed, the majority of Turks believe that when something is done with the intent of pleasing God and without expectation of worldly reward, it will create abundance. For example, if an individual gives a portion of his or her money to the poor or needy, he/she expects that the rest of that money will become abundant (i.e., more than enough to meet the individual's needs). This idea of abundance resulting from generosity is applied not only to money, but also to time, life and other tangible objects, such as crops, food and so on. It is believed that if an individual commits a portion of his time to a good deed, he will be more efficient and productive in using the remainder of his time.

This concept of *bereket* has its root in the Qur'an, which says:

> Those men and women who give alms (by spending out of their wealth in both the prescribed and supererogatory duties of almsgiving) and lend to God a goodly loan (by spending either in His cause or for the needy), it will be increased manifold to their credit, and they will have an honorable, generous reward in addition (57:18)[25]

Bereket is a word used commonly in everyday Turkish life, whether or not the speaker holds a particularly religious worldview. For example, after completing a business transaction, store owners or salesmen say, "May Allah make it abundant" ("*Allah bereket versin*"), while putting the money in their pockets or into the cash

[23] Ergun (1922).

[24] Collin (1960).

[25] See also: Quran 64:18 which says "If ye loan to Allah, a beautiful loan, He will double it to your (credit), and He will grant you Forgiveness: for Allah is most Ready to appreciate (service), Most Forbearing."

register. In more rural areas, when a person visits a neighbor in the process of harvesting, he or she says, "Let it be abundant!" ("*Bereketli olsun*").[26]

In addition, the Prophet Abraham is considered to be an important model of generosity and hospitality. Folk legend has it that he had a house with four gates. All of the gates were kept open; and people would come from every direction to partake of his table. He always had guests and his table was always full. Turks believe, accordingly, that guests bring abundance and blessings to the host. Numerous linguistic expressions indicate this belief. For example, after dining in someone else's home, Turks say, "Let this table be like the table of Abraham!", meaning let it be rewarded with wealth and blessings. As one travels through Turkey's cities and towns, one also sees many restaurants called "Abraham's Table" ("*Halil İbrahim Sofrası*").

Komsuluk (Neighborliness)

Generosity and good relations with neighbors are also of utmost importance in Turkish–Islamic culture. Many Turks are aware that the Prophet Muhammad emphasized the importance of having good relations with neighbors and can cite prophetic traditions such as: "The Prophet said, "Gabriel continued to recommend that I treat my neighbors kindly and politely so often that I thought he would order me to make them my heirs"[27] and

> Allah's Apostle said, 'Anybody who believes in Allah and the Last Day should not harm his neighbor, and anybody who believes in Allah and the Last Day should entertain his guest generously and anybody who believes in Allah and the Last Day should talk what is good or keep quiet (i.e., abstain from all kinds of evil and dirty talk).[28]

Muslim scholars unanimously agree that non-Muslim neighbors have the same rights as Muslim neighbors since no prophetic traditions specifically mention Muslim neighbors, and some traditions relate incidents of the Prophet Muhammad's or his family members' generosity toward Jewish neighbors.[29]

In the modern Turkish language, various proverbs indicate the high value of good neighbors. These include: "Don't buy a house, acquire a neighbor!" ("*Ev alma, komşu al!*") and "A neighbor might need even the ash of his neighbor" ("*Komşu komşunun külüne muhtaçtı.*"). Accordingly, most Turks make an effort to

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[26] Other phrases in the Turkish language describe how abundance or blessings have been cut off ("*Bet bereket kesildi.*") or have ended ("*Bereket kalktı.*") due to a person's lack of generosity). The variety of common phrases using the word "*bereket*" indicate that this concept has become an integral part of Turkish culture.

[27] Al-Bukhârî, Adab, 28. *Riyâd-us-Sâliheen* (1991).

[28] Sahih Bukhari, Volume 8, Book 73, No. 47.

[29] Diyanet İslam Ansiklopedisi, "Komşu," p. 157.

keep good relations with their neighbors by greeting them with a smile and engaging in short chats, by inviting them for tea or coffee, by visiting them on holidays and/or in times of trouble, by offering them extra helpings of cookies, stuffed grape leaves or whatever has been cooked at home that day, and by keeping family noise to a minimum. Turkish housewives, in particular, tend to have closer relationships with neighboring housewives, and often share the tasks of cooking, baking and child care among themselves. They might also contribute money to a monthly "pot," given in turn to a neighbor in need, or come together on Fridays to read the Qur'an.

Karz-i-Hasen

Karz-i hasen is one last important aspect of the culture of giving in Turkey. The literal meaning of the expression is "a good loan." *Karzi-i hasen* indicates a loan which is returned without interest at the end of a period agreed on by both parties. In Turkish society, as well as other Muslim societies, giving *karzi-i hasen* to help someone meet his or her needs is considered a good deed, one rewarded by God. Various Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions praise interest-free lending of money to people in need. One Qur'anic verse reads: "If you lend God a goodly loan, He will increase it manifold to you and will forgive you. God is All-Responsive (to gratitude), All-Clement (forbearing before many of the faults of His servants)."[30] Accordingly, lending money for a good reason and without charging interest is regarded as having worldly benefits for the recipient and spiritual benefits for the loaner. *Karz-i hasen*, which is said to strengthen social harmony and cooperation, is still practiced by many Turks, even though Western banking is predominant in the country. For example, most Turks would prefer to pay their monthly bills or buy their cars and homes via *karzi-i hasen* from close relatives, neighbors or friends, rather than take a loan from a bank or creditor.

The Gülen Movement's Revival of Turkish–Islamic Philanthropy

As the above examples make evident, Islamic and Turkish culture have amalgamated to create a long and rich tradition of giving in Turkey. In this context it becomes easy to see that one reason for the success of the Gülen movement is its ability to gain peoples' trust by tapping into the network of philanthropic urges already present in Turkish society. For example, when Mr. Gülen outlined his vision

[30] Qur'an, 64:17.

of providing quality education for all Turkish youth by establishing dormitories, preparatory courses, and ultimately, high schools and universities, he called upon everyone inspired by his vision to take part in providing these opportunities for the young people in Turkey. He challenged men and women to become teachers and dedicate their lives to teaching the youth, principals to be devoted to establishing first-rate curricula and suitable environments for learning, and businessmen to expand their businesses and make them more lucrative so that they could monetarily support the activities of the movement. Furthermore, he expressed his call to action in terms of fundamental Turkish–Islamic values: hospitality, giving, charity and the obligation to help the needy in society. These ideas and the sacrifices they entailed were familiar to those who heard and heeded Gülen's call because they were embedded in the culture in which they were raised. Gülen simply provided ways in which Turks could express the generosity and giving that they were called to by the tenets of their culture and religion. In short, participants in the movement who give *sadaka* to poor students, who send their *kurban* meat to poor families in Southeast Turkey or the heart of Africa, who dedicate their careers and/or business toward good deeds (*hayır hasenat*) or who help the victims of natural disasters are motivated by the age-old traditions of charity and philanthropy in Turkish society.