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Beggary in Yorubaland: An Islamic Theological Analysis of Syncretic Beliefs

Shaykh-Luqman Jimoh[1]

Mubin Olatoye Raji[2]

Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of beggary as an economic activity in Yorubaland, focusing on the Islamic theological implications of the syncretic practices that underpin it. These practices, which conflict with Islamic teachings, are used by beggars to seek protection, spiritual fortification, and to fulfill certain desires of almsgivers. Through a qualitative method, the research draws on Islamic texts, field observations, interviews with Muslim clerics, beggars and community leaders. The findings reveal significant theological contradictions between Islamic principles and the syncretic practices observed, shedding light on their impact on the spiritual and socio-economic well-being of beggars in the region. The study uncovers a complex relationship between traditional Islamic values and local customs, illustrating how beggars navigate their identities within a framework of religious faith and societal expectations. The study calls for the Muslim community to reaffirm core Islamic teachings on charity, reject harmful superstitions and advocate for a more equitable and spiritually sound approach to assisting those in need. By offering a deeper understanding of the socio-religious dynamics surrounding beggary in urban

[1] Professor of Islamic Studies and Vice Chancellor, Kwara State University, Nigeria.
[2] Senior lecturer, Department of Religions, Kwara State University, Nigeria.
mubin.raji@kwasu.edu.ng
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2390-0542DOI
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contexts, this study provides valuable insights for policymakers and social workers involved in poverty alleviation and community development efforts.

Keywords: *Beggary, Yorubaland, Syncretism, Islamic Theology, Spiritualized Alms Giving*

1.0 Introduction

The phenomenon of beggary in Nigeria urban settings has garnered increasing attention from scholars[1] and policymakers. In many Yoruba towns and cities, beggary has become a prevalent social issue. The population of beggars on the streets of urban cities is growing exponentially.[2] Beggars are highly visible in public places, commercial centers, residential neighbourhood, ceremonies, places of worships, campuses and inside buses.[3] This practice is not merely a result of economic desperation; it is deeply intertwined with local customs, religious beliefs and societal norms. The act of begging in Yorubaland is not solely driven by economic necessity; it is also shaped by a complex web of beliefs and practices.[4] In Islamic culture, charity known as *ṣadaqah*, is a fundamental tenet, encouraging community members to support those in need. This religious obligation fosters a sense of communal responsibility, often leading to a perception of beggars as deserving recipients of help.[5]

In most Yoruba cities, the Islamic faith plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes towards poverty and charity. Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of assisting those in need, presenting a duality where beggary can be seen as both a moral obligation to help

[1] M. O. Jelili, "Environmental and Socio- economic Dimensions Begging in Ilorin and Ogbomoso" Unpublished M. Tech Dissertation, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Ladoke Akintola, 2006; A. A. Adedibu "Begging and Poverty in Third World Cities: A case study of Ilorin, Nigeria" *Ilorin J. Bus. Soc. Sci. (IJBSS),* 1: 1989, pp. 25 – 40; D. V. Ogunkan, & O. A. Fawole "Incidence and socio economic Dimensions of Begging in Nigerian Cities: The Case of Ogbomoso" *international NGO journal*, 2009, pp.23-34; C. Okoli "The Menace of Organised Street Begging in Lagos, Nigeria" *Newsletter 10, Disability Awareness in Action* 1993, p. 29.

[2] A. Yusuf *et al*, "Patterns of Street-Begging, Support Services and Vocational Aspirations of People Living with Disabilities in Ilorin, Nigeria", 2006, retrieved from file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/Pattern%20of%20%20Street%20Begging.pdf.

[3] O. M. Osagbemi, "Socio – economic Characteristics of Beggars and Level of Participation in Street Begging in Jos" *J. Environ. Sci*., 5(1): 2001, p. 98.

[4] M. O. Jelili, "Environmental and Socio- economic Dimensions Begging in Ilorin and Ogbomoso" p. 124.

[5] K. A. I. Shuweikh, "The Phenomenon of Begging: Its Causes and Treatment According to the Islamic Perspective", *Journal of Critical* Vol. 7 (15), 2020, pp. 5335-5350.

and a source of social stigma. This duality raises critical questions about the motivations behind begging, the perceptions of beggars and the community's responses. However, the reality of beggary is multidimensional, influenced by local customs, social stigma and the interplay between traditional beliefs and Islamic teachings. Understanding this practice within this context necessitates a critical examination of the syncretic beliefs that influence both the beggars and the almsgivers. It is important to clarify here, that in this study, the terms 'beggary' and 'begging' will be used interchangeably as key terms.

1.1 Review of Previous Research Studies

The act of begging as an economic activity in Yorubaland has been extensively studied from various social, economic and cultural perspectives. Several works focus on the interplay between beggary and Islamic teachings, highlighting the religious, cultural and socio-economic factors driving the practice. For example, the work of Abdul Razaq discusses the tension between begging and charity in Nigeria, noting that while charity is encouraged in Islam, begging is often stigmatized. He suggests that Islamic education and Western schooling can help make individuals self-sufficient and reduce begging.[1] Similarly, Ogunkan in his scholarly work explores how Islamic teachings on almsgiving (such as *Zakāh* and *Ṣadaqah*) do not support begging, although cultural practices in Northern Nigeria have made it seem as though begging is part of Islamic culture. Ogunkan calls for addressing these cultural misinterpretations.[2] Another relevant work by Al-Shuweikh examines the multifaceted causes of begging, including economic hardship, lack of education and social dislocation, and stresses the importance of charity in Islam as a way to alleviate these issues. He also highlights the role of government in improving social protection for beggars.[3] The focus of Dalhat's work is on the socio-economic roots of begging, arguing that inadequate social welfare systems and systemic poverty are primary drivers of the practice. He advocates for improving social welfare, providing vocational

[1] T. A. Abdul Razaq, "Between Begging and Charity among Muslims in Nigeria: A Textual Evaluation", *Anayigba Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Kogi State University, Anyigba, vol. 1 (2), 2019, p. 13.

[2] D. V. Ogunkan, "Begging and Almsgiving in Nigeria: The Islamic perspective" *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* Vol. 3(4), 2011, pp. 127-131, retrieved online fromhttp://www.academicjournals.org/ijsa.

[3] K. A. I. Shuweikh, "The Phenomenon of Begging: Its Causes and Treatment According to the Islamic Perspective" p. 5339.

training and creating employment opportunities as sustainable solutions to reduce begging.[1] Fawole *et al* offer a sociological analysis of urban begging, emphasizing the role of migration and urbanization, and calling for a shift in societal attitudes towards beggars as victims of systemic failure rather than moral failures.[2] Research on street-begging among people with disabilities in Ilorin by Yusuf *et al* highlights the unique challenges faced by disabled beggars, including limited access to employment and inadequate support systems. They recommend vocational training centers and the banning of street begging in Nigeria.[3]

While these studies provide valuable insights into the socio-economic factors driving beggary, they focus primarily on poverty, unemployment and the role of Islamic teachings in mitigating begging. However, there is a notable gap in research addressing the influence of syncretic beliefs—where local cultural practices contradict with Islamic teachings—on begging behaviours in Yorubaland. This gap is important because these beliefs shape attitudes towards beggary and almsgiving in the region, where Islam is practiced alongside traditional Yoruba customs.

This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the dynamics of beggary in Yorubaland through an Islamic perspective, examining how syncretic beliefs influence the motivations and justifications for both beggary and almsgiving. While almsgiving is a commendable and integral practice in Islam, the way it is carried out—especially when influenced by spiritualists who advise giving to targeted beggars—raises several critical issues, which this study seeks to examine.

[1] Y. Dalhat, "Social Welfare and the Problem of Begging in Nigeria" *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* (IOSR-JHSS), Vol. 21, (12), 2016, pp. 07-11.

[2] D. V. Ogunkan & O. A. Fawole "Incidence and socio economic Dimensions of Begging in Nigerian Cities: The Case of Ogbomoso" *Int. NGO J.*, 4 (12): 2009, pp. 498-503, retrieved from http:// www.academicjournals.org/ingo.

[3] A. Y. Mudanssir, "Street begging and Islamic injunctions: Positive or negative?" *Daily Triumph,* 2010, p. 34.

2.0 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the syncretic beliefs that shape beggary and almsgiving practices in selected Yoruba communities. Two primary methods—field observations and semi-structured interviews were used to generate rich, contextual data from beggars, Muslim clerics and community elders.

2.1 Sampling Strategy

A **purposive sampling** technique was adopted to select participants who possessed direct knowledge of the phenomenon. A total of **28 participants** were involved:

1. 10 beggars (including elderly, blind, disabled, women, and child beggars),
2. 10 Muslim clerics who act as spiritual consultants in various Yoruba towns, and
3. 8 community elders familiar with cultural and religious practices surrounding beggary.

Participants were selected based on three criteria:

1. Direct involvement in begging, almsgiving, or spiritual advisory roles.
2. Residence in Yoruba-dominated urban centres (Ilorin, Lagos, Ibadan, Oyo).
3. Willingness to participate and ability to provide first-hand information.

2.2 Interview Structure and Procedure

The interviews were semi-structured, allowing the researcher to explore predetermined themes while giving participants flexibility to narrate their experiences. Interview guides were prepared around the following themes:

i. Motivations for begging or advising almsgiving
ii. Beliefs surrounding targeted charity
iii. Experiences with spiritualized alms
iv. Perceptions of Islamic rulings on shirk, charms, and protective practices

Interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes and were conducted in locations convenient and comfortable for participants—such as mosque premises, community centres or open, public areas for beggars.

2.3 Field Observation Procedure

Field observations were carried out over four months (June–September 2024) in major Yoruba cities, focusing on areas with high concentrations of beggars: markets, motor

parks, mosques, festival grounds and street intersections. Observations occurred 2–3 times weekly, each session lasting 1–2 hours.

An observation framework guided the process, focusing on:

i. Types and behaviours of beggars
ii. Interactions between beggars and almsgivers
iii. Patterns of targeted charity
iv. Use of charms, rituals or spiritual objects
v. Gestures, reactions or suspicions by beggars receiving alms

2.4 Data Recording During Observations

Data were recorded using a combination of:

i. Field notes documenting behaviours, locations and interactions
ii. Audio recordings, where permitted, during interviews with clerics and community elders
iii. Daily reflective memos to capture impressions, emerging patterns and researcher bias

Where recording was not possible (e.g., with beggars who declined audio capture), detailed written notes were taken immediately after encounters.

2.5 Transcription and Language Considerations

Interviews conducted in Yoruba were translated into English by the researcher, who is fluent in both languages. All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim within 48 hours to preserve accuracy. Translations prioritised meaning, cultural nuance, and religious terminology, ensuring that concepts such as *barakah*, *ajé*, *aṣẹ*, *shirk*, and *amulets* retained their contextual significance.

2.6 Approach to Participants

Approaching beggars and clerics required sensitivity due to the spiritual and personal nature of the subject. The researcher followed these steps:

1. Initial rapport building, especially with beggars, by offering greetings and explaining the purpose of the study in simple terms.
2. Assurance of anonymity, particularly for clerics whose views might contradict mainstream Islamic teachings.
3. Verbal informed consent for all interviews.

4. Non-coercive engagement, ensuring beggars understood that participation would not affect any alms they normally received.

This ethical approach enhanced trust and improved the authenticity of participants' responses.

2.7 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Codes were generated from repeated ideas related to syncretism, spiritualized almsgiving, fear of cursed alms, protective strategies, and Islamic theological interpretations. Emerging themes were compared across participant groups to ensure triangulation of findings.

3.0 The Evolving Face of Beggary in Yorubaland

The evolving face of beggary in Yorubaland serves as a microcosm of the larger socio-economic challenges facing Nigeria. Traditionally, the act of begging in most cities and towns in Yorubaland was primarily associated with the economically disadvantaged, especially the elderly, disabled individuals and those displaced by socio-economic crises. In other words, begging in this region has evolved to reflect broader economic and social changes, revealing emerging trends and a complex web of concerns.

3.1 Different Forms of Beggary in Yorubaland

3.1.1 Traditional Forms of Begging

In Yorubaland, traditional forms of begging have deep cultural roots and are intertwined with the social fabric of the communities. Unlike the modern practice of beggary often associated with urban poverty, traditional beggary reflects a set of customs and practices that resonate with the region's historical and cultural identity.

1. Religious and Cultural Begging

One prominent form of traditional begging in Yorubaland occurs during religious festivals and communal gatherings. Events such as the *Osun-Osogbo* festival, *Egungun* festival or the *Eyo* festival in Lagos see individuals, often adorned in traditional attire, soliciting alms from attendees as part of their spiritual or cultural practices. This form of begging is typically framed as a communal duty; participants believe that giving to the less fortunate during such occasions earns them blessings and strengthens communal bonds. [1]It

[1] A. A. Adedibu "Begging and Poverty in Third World Cities: A case study of Ilorin, Nigeria", p. 35.

is not uncommon for individuals to approach festival-goers, invoking spiritual significance to their requests.

2. Begging by *Iya-Ibeji* (Twin's Mother)

Begging by *Iya-Ibeji* (the mother of twin) is also an acceptable form of traditional begging in Yoruba culture. *Iya-Ibeji* often engage in begging, especially during traditional festivals or ceremonies dedicated to twins, such as the *Ibeji* Festival. During these events, the community collectively supports the *Iya-Ibeji*, who may solicit alms as a way to provide for her twins. [1] This form of begging is culturally accepted and viewed as an extension of the communal ethos, where it is understood that the well-being of the mother and her twins reflects the community's health and fortune.[2] In Yoruba tradition, twins are considered a blessing, often believed to bring prosperity and good fortune. The *Iya-Ibeji* is revered within the community and is often seen as a custodian of the spiritual and cultural heritage associated with twins. She is expected to care for her twins while participating in rituals that honour them, which may include offerings and prayers to ensure their health and well-being.[3]

3. Traditional Child Begging

Children also participate in traditional begging, often as part of community events or religious celebrations. They might go from house to house during festivals, singing songs or reciting prayers in exchange for food or small coins. This practice is rooted in the idea of nurturing empathy and charity from a young age, teaching children the importance of giving and community support. It also serves to remind families of their responsibilities to the younger generation. One prominent form of traditional child begging in one of the Yoruba towns is known as "*Amuda"*.[4] This practice involved school-age children going from house to house on Thursday nights, chanting the eulogy of the Prophet Muhammad (*Madhu Nabiyy*) and offering prayers in hopes of receiving money and food. This ritual not only allowed the children to collect money and food but also served as a means of

[1] M. O. Jelili, "Environmental and Socio- economic Dimensions Begging in Ilorin and Ogbomoso" p. 167.

[2] R. E. E. Nwobodo, "Street Begging: A Devaluation of Igbo Humanism", retrieved from file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/Street%20Begging%20and%20Igbo%20Humanism.pdf.

[3] G. O. Adekannbi, "Plutarch's Essay on Superstition as a Socio-Religious Perspective on Street Begging," *Journal of Philosophy and Culture*, Vol, 5, No.1, 2017, p. 14.

[4] This particular form of traditional begging is predominantly practiced by children in Ilorin city, where it has become a distinctive and culturally entrenched activity exclusive to the younger population.

community engagement and spiritual reflection.[1] During Ramadan, the practice intensified, with children participating daily, reinforcing the connection between charity, faith and community. The act of giving during this holy month was seen as a virtuous deed, and many families were willing to support these young beggars as a way of fulfilling their religious obligations.[2] The *Amuda* also aligns with *Ajisari*, a culturally significant form of begging in most Yorubaland, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan. This practice involves individuals, often referred to as *ajisari*, who wake Muslims for the pre-dawn meal known as *sahur*. Typically, *ajisari* practitioners go from house to house, gently waking Muslims in their neighborhoods before dawn. They often do this by calling out greetings, singing traditional songs, or even using musical instruments like the *gangan* (talking drum) and *sakara*.[3] This lively approach helps create a festive atmosphere, reinforcing the communal joy associated with Ramadan. In return for their efforts, *ajisari* practitioners may receive food, money, or other forms of assistance from those they wake.[4] This unique form of begging is deeply intertwined with the spiritual and communal aspects of Ramadan, reflecting the values of generosity, community support and religious devotion within Yoruba society.

The *Amuda* and *Ajisari* practice, in particular, exemplify how begging can transcend mere financial need, becoming cultural events that foster social cohesion. Additionally, these traditions are often accompanied by specific prayers or chants that invoke blessings upon the givers. This spiritual dimension adds a layer of significance, as it connects the act of giving to faith and communal identity. The exchange is not just economic; it is a reinforcement of cultural values that prioritize helping one another, especially during times of religious observance.

3.1.2 Other Forms of Beggary in Yorubaland

In recent years, the landscape of beggary in Yorubaland has shifted. While traditional practices like *Amuda* have declined, new forms of beggary have emerged,

[1] Personal communication with Alfa Aminullahi Abubakar Bube, Khalifah Nda Agba Koro, Isale Gambari, Ilorin, on 26/10/2024, aged 58. Alfa Aminullah is well-acquainted with the community of beggars in Ilorin, possessing a deep knowledge of their circumstances. He is particularly aware of the challenges they face, especially in relation to the alms they receive from individuals with dubious or malicious intentions.

[2] Personal communication with Alfa Aminullahi Abubakar Bube.

[3] Personal communication with Alhaji Isa Salami, who is a prominent Were/Ajisari musician of the 60's, in his residence, Ojo town, Lagos State on 23/10/2024.

[4] Personal communication with Alhaji Isa Salami.

reflecting changing socio-economic dynamics. Today, many children and adults engage in begging by employing various tactics, including performing prayers or chants to attract the attention of passersby in markets, busy streets and public spaces.[1] Some beggars are now employing innovative tactics, like using children or pregnant women to evoke sympathy, while others display fake injuries or disabilities. This orchestrated display of vulnerability manipulates passersby into parting with their money.[2]

1. Unsolicited Entertainers

They are group of beggars who will voluntarily attend a social event like weddings, burials, turbaning and child naming to beg for alms from people without being invited by the celebrant. Some of them will bring along musical instruments such as flutes, drums and trumpets to entertain the guests. This group of beggars do not come in the form of usual beggars. Instead they use the above-mentioned occasions for their services.[3] While describing the activities of these individuals, Abdullahi states:

> They do not mind whether the celebrant will pay them for the job or not. They are interested in the caliber of guest that will be coming for the occasion. They subtly take advantage of their service to eulogize the guests and try to delight them by praising them and singing songs, in a bid to move such a person to bring out money. Most times, the guest will be left with no option other than to dig their hand in their pocket and bring out something to avoid embarrassment, even though they have not intended to do it. [4]

2. Corporate Beggars

They are set of individuals who cannot be recognized as beggars, by merely looking at them. They are well-dressed and stand near ATM galleries and schools to beg for money. Investigations revealed that these beggars, including 'corporately dressed' people, now hang

[1] O. A. Fawole, "The Menace of Begging in Nigerian Cities: A Sociological Analysis", *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2006, p. 4.

[2] S. C. Reddy, "Begging and its Mosaic Dimensions: Some Preliminary Observation in Kadapa District of Andhra Pradesh," *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 4, p. 56.

[3] Personal communication with Alh. Imām ʿAbdul Ḥakeem ʿUthmān, Chief Imām of Hasbunallah Central Mosque, Egan, Lagos on 27/4/2023. He is 50 years.

[4] This view is expressed by Alh. ʿUstādh Abdullāh Taiye at his residence, Taiwo Isale, Ilorin, on 1/9/2024. Aged 55 years.

around strategic places in the metropolis, especially ATM points, to beg for financial assistance.[1]

3.2 Emerging New Trends of Begging in Yorubaland

Begging, a perennial social issue in Yorubaland, has assumed new dimensions in recent years. The traditional image of beggars on street corners and marketplaces has given way to more sophisticated and technology-driven methods. A noticeable trend is the increasing influx of street beggars from neighboring regions, especially the core north seeking better opportunities. These individuals often migrate to urban centers like Ibadan, Ilorin, Lagos and other major urban cities in hopes of finding more generous donations from passersby. This influx has diversified the profiles of beggars, now including children, women and even organized groups engaging in strategic begging techniques.

3.2.1 Online Begging

The rise of social media has enabled beggars to reach a wider audience. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter now X are now used to solicit funds, often under the guise of medical emergencies, educational expenses, or business ventures. This trend, known as "online begging" or "cyber-begging", exploits the empathy and generosity of Nigerians. It is observed that some social media influencers use their platforms to share the stories of those in need and solicit help for them, thus blending traditional begging with modern technology.[2] This adaptation not only broadens their reach but also reflects a changing societal perspective towards assistance and charity.

3.2.2 Professional Begging

Professional begging syndicates have emerged, with organized networks of beggars operating in major areas of Yorubaland. These groups often recruit vulnerable individuals, including children and the disabled, and deploy them to strategic locations. Professional begging syndicates are often described as organized groups that run begging as a form of business.[3] These groups are typically led by a few individuals who manage and direct the begging operations, coordinating the movement and deployment of beggars to strategic

[1] R. E. E. Nwobodo, "Street Begging: A Devaluation of Igbo Humanism".

[2] V. U. Ndichiamaka & K. M. Okoye, "Begging Enterprise: A Growing Trend among Igbo Christians in Nsuka Urban City".

[3] V. U. Ndichiamaka & K. M. Okoye, "Begging Enterprise: A Growing Trend among Igbo Christians in Nsuka Urban City".

locations. Unlike traditional, individual begging, which tends to be spontaneous or driven by personal need, professional begging syndicates operate with a clear structure and organization, akin to a network or a "begging enterprise."[1]

One of the key features of these professional begging syndicates is the recruitment of vulnerable individuals to participate in their activities. These groups specifically target people who are more likely to evoke sympathy or elicit alms from the public, such as children, the elderly and people with disabilities.[2] The beggars who are part of these syndicates are typically deployed to carefully selected locations, where the flow of people and potential donors is highest. These locations are often in busy urban centers, at major traffic intersections, near markets, or in front of religious or commercial institutions. Some beggars are even strategically placed outside wealthy residential areas or offices, where they can appeal to those with disposable income or a sense of charity. The syndicates may use tactics such as rotating their 'staff' throughout the day or across different locations, ensuring that the same individuals are not seen begging in one spot for too long, which could draw suspicion.[3]

4.0 A Critical Examination of Syncretic Beliefs in Beggary and Almsgiving in Yorubaland

In Yorubaland, as in many other parts of Nigeria, beggary is deeply intertwined with religious and cultural practices, and as such, beggars are not always seen with contempt. This cultural framework is reflected in the presence of a designated leader—often referred to as the "king" of beggars—who is said to be appointed by a local royal figure.[4] People give to beggars for a variety of reasons: some out of genuine piety, whether sincere or driven by social expectation; others may give simply to avoid discomfort or to alleviate a perceived burden; and still others are guided by spiritual practitioners who advise such acts as a means of seeking divine favour, protection or fulfillment of personal wishes, here lies the crux of this study. In assessing the practices of begging and alms-giving within the context of Yoruba culture, particularly the syncretic elements that

[1] R. E. E. Nwobodo, "Street Begging: A Devaluation of Igbo Humanism".

[2] R. E. E. Nwobodo, "Street Begging: A Devaluation of Igbo Humanism".

[3] O. A. Fawole, "The Menace of Begging in Nigerian Cities: A Sociological Analysis".

[4] In Ilorin, the Emir has appointed four successive 'kings of beggars', each entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing and managing the affairs of the beggar community in the city. These appointed leaders are given the mandate to regulate the practices and well-being of beggars, ensuring that their needs are met while also maintaining order within this unique social group."

intertwine traditional beliefs with Islamic principles, it is essential to critically examine how these practices align or conflict with Islamic teachings. Islam, as a faith, offers a comprehensive moral framework that shapes the understanding of charity (*Ṣadaqah* and *Zakāh*) and the ethical obligations towards those in need.

4.1 Spiritualized Almsgiving in Yorubaland: The Role of Spiritual Consultants and the Risk of *Shirk*

Begging has surged and persisted in many Yoruba communities because both beggars and some almsgivers—especially those advised by spiritual consultants (such as Muslim clerics and traditional spiritualists)—view it as a way to address spiritual issues. This belief further reinforces the practice of begging. In Yorubaland, the influence of Muslim clerics, who act as spiritual consultants and promote almsgiving as a path to spiritual merit, amplifies the syncretic blending of religious practices. Their endorsement of begging as a legitimate way to gain divine favour helps legitimize the practice, encouraging both beggars and donors to participate.

Muslim spiritual consultants in Yorubaland wield considerable influence over socio-cultural practices, advising individuals on whom to give alms to achieve particular outcomes—be it financial prosperity, health or spiritual cleansing. They claim to possess the ability to identify "worthy" recipients based on spiritual insights.[1] However, this guidance can be fraught with peril. These spiritualists often present their recommendations as part of a broader spiritual or community obligation. However, the selection of specific beggars is often arbitrary and based on personal belief systems rather than any measurable criteria that indicate genuine need or worthiness. While the intention behind such almsgiving may stem from a desire to do good, the reality is often far more complex and troubling, particularly when it intersects with malevolent intentions.[2] The Muslim cleric may recommend specific forms of charity based on an individual's circumstances, whether they are seeking protection from misfortune, desiring wisdom to navigate challenges, or hoping for a longer and healthier life, including giving to white-turbaned beggars, blind beggars and the elderly based on their understanding of an individual's needs and spiritual state. The guidance from the clerics is often deeply rooted in Islamic teachings but is also adapted to local customs and the Yoruba worldview. The recommendation to give alms to these beggars reflects the belief that certain individuals — especially those who are

[1] Personal communication with Alfa Aminullahi Abubakar Bube, Khalifah Nda Agba Koro.

[2] Personal communication with Alfa Aminullahi Abubakar Bube, Khalifah Nda Agba Koro.

spiritually inclined or who have a close relationship with God — can serve as conduits for divine favour.[1]

In the Yoruba tradition, spiritualists (i.e. *Babalawos*, traditional healers, or spiritual advisors) also play a crucial role in guiding individuals through spiritual practices that are meant to counteract negative forces. If a person is facing enemies, whether in the form of rivalry, envy, or even mystical attacks, the spiritualist might recommend giving alms to the blind as a specific remedy.[2]

The spiritualist's advice is rooted in a broader understanding of balance between the material and spiritual worlds. They may interpret an individual's challenges as stemming from spiritual disharmony, and giving alms to the blind is seen as a way of restoring this balance. The act of giving is not just a matter of charity; it is a deliberate spiritual strategy to enhance one's destiny, remove negative influences, and align oneself with the divine.[3]

A critical issue with this practice of spiritualized alms giving is the potential for it to lead to *shirk* (associating partners with Allāh). In Islām, the ultimate source of all blessings, protection and spiritual benefit is Allāh alone. Any belief that an intermediary, such as a spiritualist or a beggar, has the power to bestow blessings or ward off harm outside of Allāh's will is contrary to the core Islamic principle of *tawḥīd* (the oneness of Allāh).[4] The Qur'ān clearly teaches that no one has control over the unseen or the ability to influence fate except Allāh: *"Say, 'I do not possess for you [the power of] harm or guidance.'"* (Qur'ān 72:21). The practice of seeking spiritual guidance from a Muslim cleric or spiritualist about which beggars to target for charity can dangerously blur the lines between seeking Allāh's favour and relying on occult or superstitious practices.[5]

When a Muslim cleric or spiritualist advises someone to give alms to a specific beggar for the sake of receiving blessings or avoiding curses, the belief in the beggar's or

[1] This View is expressed by ʿUstādh ʿAbdul Fatai Olohuntoyin through phone call on 20/8/2024. He is aged 55.

[2] Personal communication on phone call with Chief Razaq Apena, Spiritual head of Awoko Healing Center, Ede, Osun State on 23/10/2024. He is aged 67.

[3] Personal communication on phone call with Chief Razaq Apena.

[4] A. A. Bin Bāz, *Ḥirāsatu't-Tawḥīd*, Saudi-Arabia, Ministry of Islāmic Affairs, Endowment and Daʻwah, 1432, p. 69.

[5] A.B. Philips, *The Fundamental of Tawḥīd*, Riyād, Tawḥīd Publications, 1990, p.5.

spiritualist's ability to confer such benefits places them in a position of undue spiritual significance. This introduces an element of *shirk* by associating power and control over one's fate to an intermediary rather than acknowledging that Allāh is the sole provider of blessings and guidance.[1] The Qur'ān warns against the use of intermediaries in spiritual matters: *"And if Allāh touches you with harm, there is none who can remove it but He; and if He touches you with good, He is capable of everything"* (Qur'ān 6:17).

4.2 Targeting Beggars for Almsgiving and the Spirit of Charity

In Yorubaland, the tradition of alms giving takes on a unique form, especially through the phenomenon of targeted beggars. These individuals, often strategically positioned in busy areas, rely on the generosity of passersby, drawing from the well of compassion rooted in the Islamic faith and cultural values of the community. However, beneath this surface of generosity lies a more complex narrative, particularly concerning specific groups of beggars, such as the elderly, white-turbaned individuals, child beggars, blind beggars, young females, nursing mothers and the disabled.[2]

1. The Elderly Beggars

When it comes to elderly beggars, the act of giving alms to them is seen as particularly auspicious. They are perceived not only as vulnerable and in need but also as possessing a kind of spiritual power derived from their age, experience and the respect they command within the community.[3]

[1] L. M. Adetona, "Shirk in Contemporary Nigeria", *Al-Hadarah Lasu Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, Department of Religions, Lagos State University, Ojo, 2013, p. 71.

[2] These categories of beggars are not just passive recipients of charity; they are also influenced by the social dynamics and perceived intentions of almsgivers, some of whom may harbour nefarious motives. While many almsgivers genuinely seek to help those in need, others may approach giving with ulterior motives, often influenced by recommendations from spiritual consultants.

[3] Personal communication on phone with Sheikh ʿIsā Rūhullāh, Khalīfah Dayanbiu, Epe, Lagos State on 23/10/2024. Aged 58 years.

Muslim spiritualists in particular, may recommend giving alms to elderly beggars for several important spiritual reasons, including the desire for longevity,[1] wisdom,[2] and protection against calamities and misfortune This practice is believed to activate spiritual forces that lead to blessings, safeguarding and favour from God (Allāh), while also fulfilling important Islamic and cultural duties.[3]

2. White-Turbaned Beggars

For a beggar to wear a white turban is seen as an unusual but potent symbol. It implies a combination of both humility and elevated spiritual status. The beggar, though materially poor, is symbolically rich in virtue and spiritual grace.[4] In the Yoruba Muslim context, such beggars are considered to possess a special connection to divine blessings. They are believed to be favoured by God, and their prayers are thought to be particularly potent, especially when they are approached with sincerity and humility.[5]

In this context, Muslim spiritualists in Yorubaland often recommend giving alms to beggars who wear white turbans as a powerful means of attaining spiritual breakthroughs and elevating one's position in the eyes of God. The practice is understood to have several layers of spiritual and practical significance, such as accelerating prayer acceptance;[6]

[1] The charity offered to these individuals is believed to serve as a form of spiritual protection that ensures the giver is granted health, vitality, and a long prosperous life free from untimely death or illness. Personal communication on phone with Sheikh ʿIsā Rūhullāh, Khalīfah Dayanbiu, Epe.

[2] By giving alms to elderly beggars, one is believed to be acquiring spiritual wisdom, divine knowledge, and guidance for personal growth and protection against calamities. Personal communication on phone with Sheikh ʿIsā Rūhullāh, Khalīfah Dayanbiu, Epe.

[3] Personal communication on phone with Sheikh ʿIsā Rūhullāh, Khalīfah Dayanbiu, Epe.

[4] This view is expressed by Imam Luqman Alaran, Ota, Ogun State through phone call on 12/11/2024. Aged 51 years.

[5] Personal communication on phone call with Imam Luqman Alaran, Ota, Ogun State.

[6] One of the most significant reasons for giving alms to white-turbaned beggars is the belief that doing so increases the likelihood that one's prayers will be accepted. By giving to them, one is seen to attract the attention of God, accelerating the acceptance of their own prayers, whether for personal success, healing, or general spiritual uplift. Personal communication on phone call with Imam Luqman Alaran, Ota, Ogun State.

spiritual elevation and protection;[1] a means of gaining divine blessing;[2] and breaking spiritual barriers[3]

3. Child Beggars

Children are deeply valued in both Yoruba and Islamic cultures, not just as part of the family structure but as a source of divine blessing and prosperity. In Islām, children are seen as a great gift from God and a form of joy for parents, with the Qur'ān referring to children as "a delight for the eyes" (Qur'ān 25:74). Children are also viewed as a form of wealth in this life, providing blessings, joy and continuing the lineage of the family. However, infertility and the inability to have children are considered significant personal and spiritual challenges.

When dealing with infertility or the desire for children, the guidance of spiritual leaders is often sought. In Yoruba Muslim communities, Muslim spiritualists may recommend specific forms of charity, including giving alms to child beggars, as a powerful spiritual remedy for infertility and as a way to invoke God's blessings for offspring. Giving alms to child beggars in this context carries both material and spiritual weight. Spiritualists advise that by helping children who are in need, particularly those who are beggars, individuals can unlock divine blessings that specifically address their desire for children or the solution to infertility. When advising a couple facing infertility, the Muslim cleric may recommend giving charity to child beggars, along with prayers, specific Qur'anic recitations and possibly other acts of spiritual purification.[4]

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[1] In Yoruba Muslim thought, spiritual elevation is achieved not only through personal devotion but also by aligning oneself with sources of divine grace and mercy. By giving alms to those who are spiritually honoured (such as the white-turbaned beggar), an individual is believed to benefit from their spiritual proximity.

[2] A white-turbaned beggar, viewed as a spiritual person in need, is often seen as an instrument for transmitting *barakah*. By giving to them, the donor opens themselves up to an outpouring of blessings that may manifest in their life as financial success, fertility, peace of mind, or success in endeavours. Virtually, all Muslim clerics communicated with expressed same view.

[3] Many Yoruba Muslims believe that life is full of spiritual barriers, some of which are caused by negative forces like jealousy, envy or the evil eye. These barriers may prevent the fulfillment of one's prayers or hinder progress in life. Giving alms to a white-turbaned beggar is believed to help break these barriers. The beggar is often seen as someone who can spiritually intercede, as their spiritual status and purity are thought to empower them to call upon God's mercy on behalf of those who help them.

[4] Personal communication with Sheikh ʿAbdul Raḥmān Ḥabeeb, Founder of Ḥabeebu llāh Spiritual Home, Okekoto, Agege, Lagos on the 3/11/2024. Aged 55 years.

4. Blind Beggars

Yoruba Muslim spiritualists may recommend giving alms to the blind as a means of overcoming enemies or negative energies because this act is believed to break curses, remove spiritual blockages, and create favourable conditions for the giver.[1]The enemies one faces are not always physical but can manifest as spiritual obstacles: jealousy, envy, gossip, or even black magic. In this context, almsgiving serves as a form of spiritual cleansing.

5. Young Female Beggars

One particular form of charity that is often recommended by Muslim spiritualists is the act of giving alms to young female beggars. This practice is believed to be especially effective for individuals seeking favourable marital prospects, whether they are looking for a good marriage, struggling with marital difficulties, or desiring the right partner. The spiritualist may also recommend other practices, such as specific prayers or Qur'anic recitations, but charity to a vulnerable young woman is seen as a key spiritual action.[2]

6. Nursing Mothers

When advising someone who is struggling with stillbirths, infant mortality, or other childbirth-related misfortunes, a Muslim cleric or spiritualist may suggest giving alms to young nursing mothers as a way of invoking divine mercy and protection. The spiritualist may also recommend specific prayers, recitations from the Qur'ān, or the use of sacred objects for additional protection. Giving alms to a young nursing mother beggar is thought to purify the giver's spirit and remove negative energies or ancestral curses that may be preventing the safe birth of children.[3]

7. Disabled and Crippled Beggars

Another specific form of charity that is widely advised by Muslim spiritual consultants is giving alms to disabled beggars. This act is believed to attract good fortune, heal personal ailments and bring about spiritual and physical healing.[4] This practice is believed to be a spiritual remedy that can heal ailments and remove misfortunes. Disabled

[1] Personal communication with Sheikh ʿAbdul Raḥmān Ḥabeeb.

[2] Personal Communication on phone with Sheikh ʿAbdullāh Olalekan Mubarak Agodi, Ibadan on 14/11/2024. Aged 58 years.

[3] Personal Communication with Sheikh ʿAbdullāh Olalekan Mubarak.

[4] Personal Communication with Sheikh ʿAbdullāh Olalekan Mubarak.

beggars are seen as powerful spiritual figures who can help the giver transcend their own struggles.

From the Islamic perspective, the practice of giving alms to specific beggars based on the belief that it will bring spiritual benefits for the giver—such as avoiding curses or acquiring divine protection—compromises the purity of the intention. In Islām, charity is not a transaction designed to attract worldly or spiritual benefits for the donor, but a way to purify wealth and draw closer to Allāh (SWT).[1] The act of giving should not be intertwined with transactional beliefs where the donor seeks a material or spiritual return, as this would dilute the essence of charity as an act of worship.

Islām teaches that charity should be given without discrimination and for the sake of Allāh (SWT), not for personal gain or as a way to attract spiritual benefit. In the Qur'ān, Allāh (SWT) says: *"The example of those who spend their wealth for the sake of Allah is like the example of a seed of grain which grows seven ears, and in each ear are a hundred grains…"* (Qur'ān 2:261). The emphasis is on the selfless nature of charity, with the reward being tied to the intention behind the act, not the specific recipient. The idea that alms should be targeted towards individuals who are seen as more "worthy" or spiritually significant, based on cultural beliefs, diverges from the Islamic understanding that all members of society deserve compassion and support.[2]

The Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) said, "*The best of charity is that which is given to the poor, the orphan and those who are in need of help*."[3] When alms-giving becomes selective, especially when done for reasons such as spiritual manipulation, it may undermine the true spirit of charity.

4.3 The Hidden Consequences of Spiritualized Almsgiving: Impacts on Beggars

In Yorubaland, the act of almsgiving has often been viewed as a noble and compassionate gesture. However, there are troubling instances where this practice takes a malevolent turn. Some individuals may offer spiritualized alms—gifts imbued with negative intentions or rituals—targeting specific beggars. This sacred act is manipulated or corrupted by negative spiritual practices, such as rubbing alms all over the body (usually

[1] T. A. Abdul Razaq, "Between Begging and Charity among Muslims in Nigeria: A Textual Evaluation" p.14.

[2] T. A. Abdul Razaq, "Between Begging and Charity among Muslims in Nigeria: A Textual Evaluation" p.14.

[3] *Ṣaḥīḥ* Bukhārī, vol. 2, bk 24, no. 2511.

money, food, live chicken or clothing) with curses before giving them to beggars as advised by spiritualists, the consequences can be far-reaching and multifaceted. These alms, rather than providing genuine assistance, sometimes lead to dire consequences for the recipients. This study revealed that victims suffer from illness, misfortunes or even death, as the gifts are thought to carry harmful energies or curses. Alfa Nda Koro relates the ordeal of some beggars succinctly:

> Beggars who receive cursed alms might experience spiritual disturbances. Depending on the strength of the curse, it could lead to confusion, sickness, or even misfortune in the lives of those who receive the cursed alms. If the beggar is spiritually sensitive or holds strong religious beliefs, they may feel the negative influence, even if they do not fully understand what has been done to them. This dark aspect of almsgiving raises questions about the true nature of charity and the responsibility of donors. Using alms in such a way reduces the recipient to a passive target for spiritual manipulation. It undermines the sanctity of charity, replacing a communal exchange with one of exploitation.[1]

Beyond the spiritual and cultural implications, the psychological effects of giving cursed alms can be profound. The person who carries out such an act may experience psychological distress or guilt after committing an act that goes against their own conscience or religious teachings. Even, if the spiritualist has advised them, they may feel uneasy or conflicted about using curses in such a way. This could lead to feelings of remorse, shame, or even paranoia as they sense negative consequences manifesting in their lives.[2]

The beggar, on the receiving end of cursed alms, may experience confusion, anxiety or a sense of heaviness. If the beggar is spiritually aware, he might feel an overwhelming presence or "negative energy" accompanying the gift. They may struggle with increased misfortune or a sense of spiritual imbalance in their lives after receiving cursed charity.

[1] Personal Communication with Sheikh ʿAbdullāh Olalekan Mubarak.

[2] Personal Communication with Sheikh ʿAbdullāh Olalekan Mubarak.

This can contribute to a cycle of suffering and helplessness that exacerbates their already difficult circumstances.[1]

From an Islamic perspective, this practice is highly problematic. In Islām, charity or alms giving is an act of selflessness meant to purify the soul of the giver and alleviate the hardship of the receiver. Allāh (SWT) clearly rejects the use of charity for personal, material or spiritual gain. The Qur'ān says, *"O you who have believed, do not nullify your alms by reproach or injury, like one who spends his wealth to be seen by the people*". (Qur'ān 2:264). This implies that charity should not carry any strings attached, such as expectations of receiving something in return or using it as a medium for curse or spiritual manipulation.

When almsgiving is imbued with curses or negative intentions, it distorts the fundamental Islamic concept of *niyyah* (intention). Islamic teachings stress that the intention behind every action, especially acts of worship like charity, must be pure and solely for the sake of Allāh.[2] Charity should be given with a clean heart, free from any ulterior motives or negative intentions. The practice of giving alms while imbued with curses, spells, or negative energy is contrary to Islamic principles, which prohibit harmful actions towards others. Such practices can be seen as forms of black magic or spiritual manipulation, both of which Islam categorically condemns.[3] The Qur'ān specifically forbids practices that involve magic or seeking harm through the use of spiritual forces. (Qur'ān 2:102)

4.4 Strategies of Beggars to Counteract Almsgiving Effects in Yorubaland

In many parts of Yorubaland, beggars navigate the complexities of almsgiving with a range of strategies designed to lessen the adverse effects of donations from individuals.

[1] The revered King of Beggars in Ilorin recounted a chilling tale of a beggar who, upon receiving alms from a certain individual, began to experience inexplicable and alarming phenomena throughout his body. As strange and unnerving occurrences intensified, those around him made desperate attempts to find a cure or explanation, but every effort proved futile. Tragically, the beggar succumbed to these mysterious afflictions and died, leaving the community both perplexed and fearful of the unsettling circumstances surrounding his demise.

[2] M. O. Raji, "The Islamic Concept of the Heart and its Relationship with Man's Intention/Actions", *A Journal of Islamic Sciences and Muslim Development*, Department of Islamic Studies, Usmanu Dan Fodiyo University, Sokoto, vol. 12, 2014, p. 21.

[3] Majdī Muḥammad Ash-Shahāwī, *Al- 'Īlāju'r-Rabbānī li's-siḥr wa'l-massi'sh-Shayṭānī,* Egypt, (3rd ed.), Mu'assasat Badran, 1998, p.180. See also, A.B. Philips; *Ibn Taymiyyah's Essay on the Jinn,* Riyādh, Tawḥīd Publications, 1989, p. 21.

This is particularly true for those who are encouraged by spiritual leaders to give as a means of achieving personal desires. For these beggars, the act of receiving alms is fraught with suspicion; they often believe that many almsgivers invoke curses or negative intentions before parting with their money or gifts. This study, revealed to a large extent, that many beggars die as a result of spiritualized almsgiving. Consequently, beggars in Yorubaland employ a range of spiritual strategies to protect themselves from the potential negative consequences of almsgiving.[1] These strategies include excessive prayers, wearing protective charms and amulets, and consuming spiritual concoctions.

4.4.1 Spiritual Protection through Excessive Prayers

Beggars often resort to frequent and elaborate prayers to invoke the protection of their Creator. By doing so, they believe they can ward off any harmful or unwanted effects that might arise from the act of almsgiving, including the perceived negative consequences of receiving charity. For example, a beggar might engage in prayers to ensure that the alms or gifts given to them are spiritually purified, so that they do not inadvertently carry negative energy, which could negatively affect their fortunes. They may also use prayer to ask for spiritual guidance on how best to use the alms received.[2] *Hayyu Dafi'* and *Ya Muḥyiya* according to a particular beggar form parts of the special invocations often recited for protection and spiritual refuge. These invocations embody the significance of divine connection and they are fundamentally pleas for divine protection against misfortune and harm.[3]

4.4.2 Wearing of Amulets and Protective Charms

Beggars also wear charms to protect themselves from the spiritual repercussions of accepting alms, especially those imbued with curses. These charms are thought to shield the wearer from spiritual contamination or curses that could be linked to the act of receiving charity. In some cases, charity may come with a hidden spiritual or nefarious intention, and as a result, beggars wear amulets to safeguard themselves from any negative spiritual ramifications that may arise as a result of the exchange.[4] In a particular town, some beggars

[1] Personal communication with Alfa Abubakar, Khalifah Agba Agba Koro.

[2] Personal communication with Mallam Adamu Bala, a renowned beggar from the Igando area of Lagos, who is also sought after for his spiritual guidance by those aware of his spiritual expertise.

[3] Personal communication with Mallam Adamu Bala.

[4] This view is expressed through personal communication with Alfa Abubakar, Khalifah Agba Agba Koro.

are observed wearing *oruka*, rings imbued with spiritual power, designed to protect them from negative spiritual influences or bad luck that may result from receiving alms. These rings are believed to act as a protective shield, safeguarding the wearer from curses, ill fortune, or any spiritual harm that could arise from the act of begging. By wearing the *oruka*, the beggars seek to ensure that the act of requesting charity does not expose them to harmful energies or misfortunes, but instead, serves as a shield against the potential negative repercussions of their vulnerable position in society.[1] In some cases, beggars may resist certain types of alms if they sense a negative spiritual impact or obligation associated with the gift. For example, if a beggar perceives that the donor's spiritual energy is too heavy or their intentions are not pure, they may turn down the alms in favour of seeking divine guidance or requesting a more beneficial offering.[2]

In another dimension, amulets are sometimes used as a tool of empowerment to increase the beggar's ability to attract more alms. These charms are believed to make the beggar spiritually enhanced, invoking sympathy or generosity from others. For example, a beggar may wear a specific charm that is said to call upon the blessings of the gods, ensuring that they receive plentiful offerings without any immediate or future negative consequences.[3]

4.4.3 Consuming Spiritual Concoctions (*Aseje* and *Agbo*)

Before receiving alms or after accepting them, beggars might consume spiritual concoctions that are believed to purify their bodies and spirits. These concoctions may be brewed with herbs, roots and other spiritual ingredients that are thought to have cleansing properties. The purpose is to remove any negative energy or "spiritual residue" from the act of begging, thus preventing the donor's energy from attacking to the beggar.[4]

Certain concoctions are believed to empower the individual spiritually, giving them the strength to overcome adversities, including the pressures or manipulations associated with receiving alms. By consuming these concoctions, beggars may seek to bolster their

[1] This study was primarily inspired by the practice of beggars in Ilorin wearing rings on their fingers, a custom believed to offer protection from the potential negative effects of the alms they receive.

[2] Personal communication with Alfa Abubakar, Khalifah Agba Agba Koro.

[3] Personal communication with Alfa Abubakar, Khalifah Agba Agba Koro.

[4] Personal Communication with Sheikh ʿAbdullāh Olalekan Mubarak.

inner strength, enabling them to resist any unseen spiritual effects or forces that may try to exert control over them following the receipt of charity.[1]

From an Islamic frame work, these practices, analyzed above, are viewed purely as acts of *shirk* (associating partners with Allāh) and a direct contradiction to the concept of *tawḥīd* (the oneness of Allāh). In Islām, reliance on anything other than Allāh for protection or success is considered *shirk* (associating partners with Allāh). Islām teaches that faith in Allāh and adherence to His guidance are the best forms of protection and provision.[2] The reliance on physical objects for spiritual blessings may lead to a dilution of faith and distract individuals from pursuing sincere and direct relationships with Allāh.

In the *Sharīᶜah*, *shirk* is classified as the most serious of major sins (*al- Kabā'ir*). This is in accordance with the *Ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Bakr, who said that the Messenger of Allāh said: "*Shall I tell you of the most serious of the major sins? he said it three times, we said, "of course, O Messenger of Allāh: He said, "Associating anything in worship with Allāh*".[3] It therefore means that anyone who indulges in the sin of *shirk* will be punished by Allāh, and the punishment is hell fire. The Qur'ān confirms: "*Surely whoever associates (others) with Allāh, Allāh has forbidden to him Garden (Paradise) and his final abode is the hell fire*'' (Qur'ān 5:72). The Prophet also corroborates. "*Whoever dies calling on someone else as a rival to Allāh will enter Hell*.[4]

The use of amulets, protective charms and consuming spiritual concoctions reflects a reliance on superstitions and intermediaries, which detracts from the Islamic belief that Allāh alone controls the unseen and provides for all His creatures. Seeking spiritual benefits from charms or concoctions diverts one's trust away from Allāh (SWT) and places it on material objects, which is considered a form of idolatry. The Qur'ān offers guidance on this matter: "*Say: 'I do not possess the power to benefit or harm myself, except as Allāh wills."* (Qur'ān 7:188) Every believer is expected to have absolute trust in Allāh and to rely totally on Him. There is, however, a very high possibility that anyone who wears amulet or protective charm will, instead of putting trust in Allāh alone, rely on the charm or amulet.[5]

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[1] Personal Communication with Sheikh ʿAbdullāh Olalekan Mubarak.

[2] See, A. A. Bin Bāz, *Ḥirāsatu't-Tawḥīd*, p. 69.

[3] *Ṣaḥīḥ* Bukhārī, *Ḥadīth* no. 2511.

[4] *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī,* ḥadīth no. 234.

[5] M. M. Ash-Shahāwī; *Al-'Īlāju'r-Rabbānī li's-siḥr wa'l-massi'sh-Shayṭānī,* Egypt, (3rd ed.), Muʻassasat Badran, 1998, p.180.

This is the essence of *shirk* involving charm as evidence in the way such people behave whenever they forget to wear the amulet or talisman.

The Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) strongly discouraged the use of amulets and charms, seeing them as an unlawful means of seeking protection or benefits. Similarly, the use of spiritual concoctions is often tied to the belief in magic or occult practices, which are strictly prohibited in Islām. In one ḥadīth, the Prophet (PBUH) once saw a man wearing an iron ring around his hand and asked him, "*What is this?" The man said, "To repel Al-wahīnah", which was a common disease among the Arabs during that time. The Prophet (SAW) said: "Take if off your hand, for verily, it will not increase your weakness, if you die while wearing it, you will not attain success*."[1]

In another tradition cited, some people came to give their covenant. The Prophet (SAW) took the covenant of nine of them, but left one. They said, "O Messenger of Allāh, you have taken the covenant of nine, but left that one," He replied, "He is wearing an amulet." The man cut it off, then the Prophet (SAW) took his covenant and said: "*Whoever wears an amulet has committed an act of shirk (polytheism)*."[2] Elsewhere, the Prophet (SAW) was reported to have invoked Allāh's curse on those who wear amulet: "*Whoever wears an amulet, may Allāh never fulfill his wish, and whoever wears a bead for protection, may Allāh never allow him rest*.[3]

5.0 Conclusion

The practice of beggary in Yorubaland, especially within the context of syncretic religious beliefs, presents a complex interplay of social, economic and spiritual dynamics. As this phenomenon evolves, so does the spiritual framework that surrounds it, combining traditional Yoruba practices with Islamic teachings. Beggary in the region is not just a means of survival for the poor, but also a practice deeply rooted in religious and spiritual beliefs. The critical examination of syncretic beliefs in this practice, as analyzed in this study, reveals a fusion of rituals, beliefs and practices that shape the way begging and almsgiving are viewed and enacted.

[1] *'Ibn Mājah; Ḥadīth* 3531, Aḥmad; *Ḥadīth* 445 .

[2] *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Ḥākim*; Ḥadīth* 417.

[3] See, Aḥmad *Ḥadīth* 154, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, Vol. 8, *Ḥadīth* 448.

Central to this study is the role of spiritualized almsgiving, which goes beyond simple charity to include seeking divine blessings, protection from harm and fulfilling spiritual duties. This practice has created a situation where spiritual consultants and intermediaries play a key role, helping almsgivers navigate this spiritual system. However, Islamic teachings warn against the risk of *shirk* (associating partners with Allāh) in this form of almsgiving. The concern is that spirituality can become commercialized, with spiritual acts being used for personal gain, shifting the focus from true devotion and compassion to materialism. Additionally, these syncretic practices also take advantage of vulnerable people, creating cycles of dependence and spiritual misguidance. To restore the true meaning of both begging and almsgiving, it is essential for the Muslim community to reaffirm the Islamic principles of charity, reject harmful superstitions and promote a fairer and more spiritually sound approach to helping those in need.

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