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E-Dawah Committee
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All About **Zakat al-Fitr** E-Da'wah Committee



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The Purpose of Zakat al-Fitr

Every Muslim is required to pay Zakat al-Fitr at the conclusion of the month of Ramadan as a token of thankfulness to God for having enabled him to observe fasts. Its purpose is to purify those who fast from any indecent act or speech and to help the poor and needy. This view is based upon the hadith which reads, "The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) enjoined Zakat al-Fitr on those who fast to shield them from any indecent act or speech, and for the purpose of providing food for the needy. It is accepted as Zakah for the one who pays it before the `Eid prayer, and it is sadaqah for the one who pays it after the prayer."

Al-Qaradawi comments on this hadith by saying that there are two purposes: one is related to the individual; for completion of his fast and compensation for any shortcomings in his acts or speech. The other is related to society; for the spreading of love and happiness among its members, particularly the poor and needy, during the day of `Eid. It also purifies one's soul from such shortcomings as the adoration of property, and from miserliness. Furthermore, it purifies one's property from the stain of unlawful earnings. It is also a cure for ailments. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "It would be better that you treat your patients with charity."

In addition, it provides for the needs of the poor and the indigent and relieves them from having to ask others for charity on the day of `Eid. The Prophet (said, "Fulfil their need on this day (i.e., the day of `Eid)"



Who Must Pay Zakat al-Fitr?

Zakat al-Fitr is incumbent on every free Muslim who possesses one Sa` of dates or barley which is not needed as basic food for himself or his family for the duration of one day and night. Every free Muslim must pay Zakat al-Fitr for himself, his wife, children, and servants. This is the opinion of Imam Malik, Al-Shafi`i, and Ahmad. Imam Abu Hanifah, however, said that it is only obligatory for one who possesses a nisab (a minimum amount of property) after fulfilling the costs of his house, servant, horse, and weapon.

Al-Khattabi explained that Zakat al-Fitr was obligatory for all Muslims, not only those who possess the nisab stating that this is the view of the majority of scholars. He said, "In essence, the rationale behind it was stated to be the purification of one who fasts from any indecent act or speech. And since every Muslim needs this, it is therefore obligatory upon every fasting Muslim, whether rich or poor, who possesses one Sa` in excess of his main staple food for the duration of one day and night. This is because so long as the essential rationale is shared by all Muslims, then they also share the same obligation."

Al-Qaradawi also asserts the majority view when he says, "It is a virtuous wisdom of Islam that it makes this Zakah obligatory not only on the rich, but also upon nearly every Muslim, for you can hardly find a person who does not



possess one Sa` of food above his main staple food for the duration of one day and night. The wisdom behind this obligation, therefore, is to prepare the poor to practice benevolence and feel the dignity and honour of giving in charity. Allah described the believers with these words, "Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity, or in adversity..." (Aal `Imran 3:134) Thus if we contemplate on this wisdom, we will not find it strange that the needy pay this Zakah, because it does not cause them to suffer any loss. He will pay only his Zakah and then receive the Zakah of various people."

Moreover, we have to bear in mind that Zakat al-Fitr is obligatory for everyone who lives until the sun sets on the last day of Ramadan. This is the point of view of the Shafi`is, Hanbalis, and Malikis. Accordingly, whoever dies before the sun sets on the last day of Ramadan is exempted. Likewise, a person who has a baby on the last day of Ramadan should pay Zakat al-Fitr for the baby. The majority of jurists argue that we should not pay Zakat al-Fitr for an embryo. But Imam Ahmad holds that Zakat al-Fitr is also obligatory for an embryo, because it is permissible to assign property to an embryo by means of a will.



When Zakat al-Fitr Is Due

The jurists agree that Zakat al-Fitr is due at the end of Ramadan. They differ, however, about the exact time. Al-Thawri, Ishaq, Malik (in one of two reports), and Al-Shafi`i (in one of his two opinions), are of the opinion that it is due at the sunset of the night of breaking the fast, for this is when the fast of Ramadan ends. However, Al-Layth, the Hanafi school, Al-Shafi`i (in his other opinion), and the second report of Malik say that Zakat al-Fitr is due at the start of Fajr (dawn) on the day of `Eid because it is an act of worship connected with `Eid, so the time of its payment should not be before `Eid just as sacrifice on the `Eid of Adha.

These two different views acquire relevance if a baby is born after sunset but before dawn on the day of `Eid; the question then is whether Zakat al-Fitr is obligatory for the baby or not. In accordance with the first view, it is not, since the birth took place after the prescribed time, while according to the second view, it is obligatory because the birth took place within the prescribed space of time.



Time of Payment

It is not permissible to delay giving Zakat al-Fitr after the day of `Eid (i.e. one may give it up to the time of the `Eid prayer). However, there are some jurists who think that it is permissible to delay giving it even after the `Eid prayer.(14) The founders of the four schools of Fiqh hold the first opinion, but Ibn Sirin and al-Nakha`i say that its payment can be delayed. Ahmad says: "I hope that there is no harm (in delaying the payment)." Ibn Raslan says that there is a consensus that payment cannot be delayed merely for the reason that it is a type of Zakah. Thus, any delay is a sin and is analogous to delaying one's prayers without an acceptable excuse.

Anyway, the founders of the four accepted Islamic legal schools agree that Zakat al-Fitr is not nullified simply by failure to pay it on its due time. If it is not paid before `Eid prayer, one is not exempt from it. It becomes a debt payable even after death. The heirs must not distribute the deceased's legacy before payment of the deceased's unpaid Zakat al-Fitr.

Most scholars believe that it is permissible to pay Zakat al-Fitr a day or two before `Eid. Ibn `Umar reported that the Messenger (peace be upon him) ordered them to pay Zakat al-Fitr before the people went out to perform the `Eid prayer. Nafi` reported that `Umar used to pay it a day or two before the end of Ramadan. However, scholars hold different opinions when a longer time period is involved. According to Abu Hanifah, it is permissible to pay it even before Ramadan so long as you make the intention of Zakah. Al-Shaf`i holds that it is permissible to do so at the beginning of Ramadan. Malik and Ahmad (in his well-known view) maintain that it is permissible to pay it only one or two days in advance.



Al-Qaradawi explains the reasons for these differences in opinion by saying that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) used to pay Zakat al-Fitr after Fajr prayer on the day of `Eid but before the `Eid prayer for the reason that the Muslim community was still small and limited in number.

During the time of the Companions the payment was made one or two days before the `Eid. After the spread of Islam the jurists permitted its payment from the beginning and middle of Ramadan so as to ensure that the Zakat al-Fitr reached its beneficiaries on the day of `Eid, thereby avoiding the possibility that the process of distribution would delay reception of the payment after the day of `Eid.

After explaining the different views regarding the time of payment, Sheikh `Atiyah Saqr stated that these differences of opinion among the jurists justify some leniency for Muslims in regard to the time of payment, and therefore a Muslim can pay at any of these times. He also took the view that paying it at different times gives the poor and needy the opportunity to benefit from Zakat al-Fitr and fulfil their needs for longer periods.

These differences are due to taking into consideration both the needs of the poor and the opportunity of attaining the wisdom behind the obligation of Zakat al-Fitr. Therefore, the most acceptable and practical approach is to apply whichever practice fulfils the purpose and wisdom behind Zakat al-Fitr, that is bringing happiness to the poor on the day of `Eid and giving their children a chance to enjoy this day as others do.



What type of food can be given and permissible substitutes?

The jurists hold different views as to the types of food which must be given as Zakat al-Fitr. The Hanbali view is that the kinds of food which can be given are five: dates, raisins, wheat, barley, and dry cottage cheese. Imam Ahmad is reported to have said that any kind of staple grain or dates are also permissible, even if the above five types are available. The Malikis and Shafi`is are of the view that it is permissible to give any kind of food as long as it is the main staple in that particular region or the main food of the person. As for the Hanafis, they permit paying the value of Zakat al-Fitr in money.

Ibn Al-Qayyim highlighted these different viewpoints and concluded that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) prescribed Zakat al-Fitr as one Sa` of dates, barley, raisins or dry cottage cheese. These were the main staple kinds of food in Madinah.

As for people of other territories, what they should pay is one Sa` of their staple grain, such as corn, rice, etc. But if their main staple food is other than grain, such as milk, meat, fish, etc., then they should pay one Sa` of that particular food. This is the opinion of the majority of scholars and is the preferred point of view, since it achieves the purpose of fulfilling the needs of the poor on the day of `Eid with the staple food of their region.



The Calculation of Zakat al-Fitr

The amount of Zakat al-Fitr, as we referred earlier, is one Sa` of food. There is consensus on this amount among the scholars with regard to all types of food except wheat and raisins. As for these two types the Shafi`is, Malikis and Hanbalis agree that the prescribed amount is one Sa`, however the Hanafis say it is sufficient to pay half Sa` from wheat and they differed with regard to raisins.

After discussing the arguments of these two opinions al-Qaradawi reached the following conclusion: wheat was not a common food amongst them during the time of the Prophet so he did not prescribe one Sa` of it as he did with the other types of food.

As for those of the Companions of the Prophet who prescribed half Sa` of wheat instead of one Sa` of barely or dates like Mu`awiyah and other Companions, he views that they did so by analogy, since the value of wheat was more than those of other types of food which were equal. But according to their opinion, he says, the value should be considered and taken as the criterion and this will cause instability and confusion for it changes from place to another and from time to time. He mentioned that in Pakistan the value of wheat is less than that of dates, then how should we pay of it half the amount (i.e. Sa`) that we should pay of dates? He also mentioned



that nowadays raisins are more expensive than wheat and dates. The only solution for these problems, he says, is to regard Sa` as the criterion and basis.

Al-Qaradawi explains why the Prophet appointed Sa` as the measure and did not prescribe it in money saying that in his opinion there are two reasons for this: First, money was still rare among the Arabs particularly the Bedouins. They did not have their own currency. So if the Prophet had prescribed it in money, he would have caused hardship to them. Second, the purchasing power of money changes from time to time. For instance, the purchasing power of a certain currency sometimes becomes low and other times high, so paying Zakat al-Fitr in money makes its value unstable. That is why the Prophet prescribed it with a stable measure, that is an amount of food which fulfils the needs of one family. For one Sa` provides a family with food for a whole day.



The Amount of Sa`

Sa` is a certain measure which equals 4 mudds (a mudd equals a handful of an average man). The contemporary equivalent weights of Sa` differs according to the stuff which is weighted. For example a Sa` of wheat equals 2176 grams, a Sa` of rice is 2520 grams, a Sa` of beans equals 2250 grams etc. Therefore some scholars are of the view that the criterion should be the measure not the weight for there are kinds of food which are heavier than others. But I think this is the case if the equivalent weight of a certain kind of food is not known. If there is no available measure or weight with the person, then he should pay 4 mudds. Nowadays, it is not that problem because ministries of religious affairs in Muslim countries and mosques and Islamic centres in Western countries announce the value of Zakat al-Fitr every year. Anyhow, this is the obligatory amount which every Muslim should pay. It is better and recommended that one pays an extra amount, particularly for those who are wealthy, for they will be rewarded for it.



Its Payment in Money

As mentioned earlier, the Hanafis permitted the payment of Zakat al-Fitr in money. This is the view of Al-Thawri, Al-Hasan al-Basri, and `Umar ibn `Abd al-`Aziz. However, the other three schools did not permit this. Their argument is that the Prophet did not do so and hence its payment in money contradicts the Sunnah of the Prophet. But some contemporary scholars support the Hanafi view since this is easier nowadays for the payer particularly in cities where people use only money for dealings. Among them are Sheikh Shaltut, al-Ghazali, and al-Qaradawi who mentioned earlier the two reasons for which the Prophet did not prescribe it in money. He also stated that the purpose of Zakat al-Fitr is to fulfil the needs of the poor and this is achieved also by payment in money and that in most cases and most countries the payment in money is more useful to the poor. He also mentioned that when the Prophet prescribed it from food, it was easy for the payer and useful for the recipient during that time. But nowadays to pay it in food is not useful for the poor because he cannot make use, for instance, of wheat or dates unless he sells them with any price, generally low, to buy his needs with the money.



Al-Qaradawi excluded the times of famines where the payment of food is more useful for the recipients and said that the criterion is the benefit of the poor so if food proves to be more useful as in times of famines and catastrophes, then its payment in kind is better. But if money is more useful, then its payment in money is better.

Nowadays, if we consider the condition in the Muslim world in general and that of Muslims in the West in particular we will discover that the second view is more convenient with the spirit of Islamic legislation and the present condition of Muslims. As we will see later when Muslims living in the West decide to transfer their Zakah funds or some of them to needy Muslims in Muslim countries, then the payment in money is more convenient.

Source. Onislam.net.



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