

Zakatul-Fitr: Significance, Rulings, and How to Pay in Ramadan

Who Should Pay Zakatul-Fitr?

Zakatul-Fitr is incumbent on every free Muslim who possesses one Sa' (2.176 kilograms or 4.797 pounds) of dates or barley over and above his basic needs of food for himself and his family/dependants for the duration of one day and night. Every free Muslim must pay Zakatul-Fitr for himself, his wife, children, and servants. Ibn Umar, may Allah be pleased with them both, said, "The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, enjoined the payment of one Sa of dates or one Sa of barley as Zakatul-Fitr on every Muslim, young and old, male and female, free and slave." (Reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Significance of Zakatul-Fitr in Ramadan

Zakatul-Fitr was declared by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) as a requisite for one's fast to be accepted. It is meant to cement the relationship between the members of the Muslim society, to alleviate the pains of the poor, to cultivate the sense of brotherhood and solidarity in the hearts of the Muslims, etc.

Various reasons are given by scholars for this obligatory charity. Some say that this charity helps the poor and needy, and takes care of their needs in the month of Ramadan and also makes it possible for them to celebrate the Eid festival with other Muslims. Other scholars maintain that this charity is meant to expiate (Kaffarah) for any mistakes or wrongdoings a person may have done during this blessed month. Ibn Abbas said,

"The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) enjoined Zakatul-Fitr so that those who fast are purified of their sins and the poor and needy are fed. Therefore, whoever gives it before the `Eid prayer, it will be counted for him as an acceptable Zakah (of al-Fitr), but if someone delays and gives it afterwards, his charity will be an ordinary one." (Reported by Abu Dawud and Ibn Majah)

Time of Zakatul-Fitr

This charity should be given during the month of Ramadan, anytime before the Eid-ul-Fitr prayer. Because it can be given anytime until the time of Eid-ul-Fitr, it is called Zakatul-Fitr. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) urged Muslims to pay this charity in the month of Ramadan.

Fixed Amount of Zakatul-Fitr

The amount of Zakat-ul-Fitr was fixed by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). It is about 5 pounds of wheat, flour, barley, dates or raisins. Some jurists also allow paying cash to the poor and needy. The head of the household must pay this amount on behalf of all the members of the household or his dependents; males or females, adults or children.

Eligible Recipients of Zakatul-Fitr

This [Sadaqah](#) should be given to the poor and needy. Individuals can also make the payments to Islamic charitable organizations that collect this fund. These organizations then should distribute these funds as soon as possible so that they reach the needy people on time.

The Place Where Zakatul-Fitr Is Paid

It is better to pay Zakatul-Fitr in the place one lives and fasts. However, if someone fasts in a country other than his home town, he should pay Zakatul-Fitr therein, this is the position of the Hanbalis and Shafi`is, because Zakatul-Fitr relates to where one is resident (during the fast).

As for sending [Zakah](#) from one country to another, it is permissible if there is a strong enough reason: The country where he lives is in no need of Zakah; another country is in dire need because of starvation, calamity, or war; or the payer has some relatives in another country who need his help. These reasons permit the Muslims to send their Zakah to the poor Muslims who are resisting aggressors or suffering from starvation and calamities, as in Palestine, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Bangladesh, Burma, etc.

Should the Muslim pay Zakatul-Fitr for his non-Muslim wife?

It is very important to note that a Muslim husband does not need to pay Zakatul-Fitr on behalf of his non-Muslim wife, according to the majority of Muslim scholars. On the other hand, Abu Hanifah and his followers see that a man in this case is obliged to pay Zakatul-Fitr on behalf of his non-Muslim wife.

Sheikh Atiyyah Saqr, former head of Al-Azhar Fatwa Committee, stated the following: “Zakatul-Fitr is to be paid by the head of the household for himself and for those he is obliged to maintain, i.e., his family members including his wife. Although all Muslim scholars agree that a man is obliged to sustain his non-Muslim wife, they differ concerning paying Zakatul-Fitr for her.

The majority of scholars, including Malik, Ash-Shafii and Ahmad, maintain that a man is not obliged to pay Zakatul-Fitr for his non-Muslim wife, as she herself is not required to pay it because she is outside the boundaries of [Islam](#). They base their opinion on the view that implies that a non-Muslim is not charged to perform the rules of Shariah. It is, moreover, reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) prescribed Zakatul-Fitr on all Muslims, free and enslaved; male and female; young and old.

Also, Zakatul-Fitr is considered a way to purify the fasting person from lewdness and abuse, as reported by Abu Dawud with a sound chain of transmitters, on the authority of [Ibn Abbas](#) (may Allah be pleased with them both). Hence, it is meaningless to demand non-Muslims to pay Zakatul-Fitr, as they are not required to observe fast, like the Muslims.

The fore mentioned hadith restricts prescribing Zakatul-Fitr to Muslims. In [the hadith](#), the word ‘Muslims’ refers to the persons on whose behalf Zakah is paid, not the person who pays it. Therefore, it is not necessary for a man to pay Zakatul-Fitr on behalf of his non-Muslim slave, even though he is obliged to maintain him. The same ruling applies to a non-Muslim wife.”

([Ibn Qudamah](#); [Al-Mughni](#); vol. 2, pp. 646-647)

Abu Hanifah and other scholars maintain that a Muslim has to pay Zakatul-Fitr on behalf of his young son who apostatizes from Islam, because one is not accountable for [apostasy](#) unless he fulfills the conditions of legal accountability that include adulthood. They also opine that a man should pay Zakatul-Fitr on behalf of his Christian or Jewish slave. They base their view on the fact that a father is obliged to maintain his young son, and a master his slave. They cite a hadith from the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) in which he said, “Pay half a Sa of barley (one Sa = 2.176 kilograms or 4.797 pounds) on behalf of everyone, free or slave; young or old; Jew, Christian or pagan.”

However, the majority of scholars have refuted this hadith, saying that it is not reported in the well-known books of Hadith.

Some argue that Zakatul-Fitr purifies the fasting person from any lewdness or abuse he committed while fasting, and is, thus, not paid on behalf of non-Muslim family members due to the fact that they do not fast. However, it is paid in favor of the needy on behalf of those who are excused from fasting. Hence, a non-Muslim wife or slave is in the same position as the excused.

This claim is also refuted by the fact that if a Muslim does not observe fasting in [Ramadan](#) without a valid excuse, he will be charged with two things; to make up for the fast and to pay Zakatul-Fitr. Neither of the two replaces the other.”

Paying the monetary value of Zakatul-Fitr

On the legitimacy of paying Zakatul-Fitr in cash, Sheikh [Yusuf Al-Qaradwi](#) said,

“First: Imam Abu Hanifah and his companions, Al-Hasan Al-Basri, Sufyan Ath-Thawri, Caliph [Umar ibn Abd Al-Aziz](#), and many other scholars permitted paying the value of Zakah, including Zakatul-Fitr, as money. Both supporters and opponents of the opinion depended on many pieces of evidence and points of views. I have detailed this matter in my book *Fiqh Az-Zakah*, in a chapter on paying the monetary value when giving Zakah.

Sheikh Ibn Taymiyah reached an opinion that is considered a compromise between these two parties, “Paying the value of Zakah in money when there is no need or interest in doing so, is impermissible... As for paying the value of Zakah as money because of a need or interest, it is permissible. For example, if a Muslim sells the fruits or the crops of his land for some dirhams, he can pay the tenth of these dirhams and he should not be asked to buy fruits or plants...

Also, if he has five camels he is obliged to give a sheep as Zakah, but if he does not find a sheep to buy, he can pay the value in cash and he is not asked to travel to another city to buy a sheep. In addition, if those who deserve Zakah ask him to pay it as money because of some need, he can do so. It was narrated that Muadh Ibn Jabal (may Allah be pleased with him) said to the people of Yemen, “You can bring me khamis and labis (local textiles) instead of the actual plants and fruit, for this will make matters easy for you and will be more useful to the poor [Muhajirun](#) (immigrants) and Ansar (helpers) in Madinah.” It was narrated that he said these words concerning Zakah, and it was said they were concerning Jizyah.” (Majmu Fatawa Ibn Taymiyah, 25/82-83, Saudi edition)

The essence of disagreement is between two schools: One school considers the total objectives of Shariah without neglecting the specific texts, and another school considers only the specific texts.

The opinion that it is permissible to pay the value of Zakatul-Fitr as money was in effect during the age of the Tabiin (the generation following the Companions) and was supported by many scholars and one of the caliphs. Ibn Abi Shaybah narrated on the authority of Awn, “I heard the letter of [Umar](#) ibn Abdul-Aziz being read to Adiiyy, the ruler, ‘The people of the divan should take from every Muslim half a dirham.’” The same reported that Al-Hasan said, “There is no harm in paying the value of Zakatul-Fitr in dirhams,” that Abu Ishaq said, “I saw them paying the value of Zakatul-Fitr in dirhams”, and that `Ata’ narrated, “I used to give the value of Zakatul-Fitr in silver dirhams.

Actually, there is much evidence that supports this opinion:

a) The Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him) said, “Enrich them (the poor) on this day.”

Enriching is achieved through food and also its value, which may even be better than food, as the poor person who has plenty of food may be forced to sell some of it; whereas if the monetary value is given it will enable him to buy whatever he wants of food, clothes, etc.

b) Ibn Al-Mundhir narrated that the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) permitted giving half a Sa of wheat, as they believed that it equaled the value of a Sa of dates or barley. Thus, Muawiyah (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “I see that two mudds (a mudd equals a handful of an average-sized man) of the Levantine wheat equal a Sa of dates.”

c) This opinion is easier for the Muslims in this age, especially for those who live in the industrialized countries where people deal only with money, and it brings great benefit in most cases for the poor in many cities.

Second, when the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) asked Muslims to give Zakatul-Fitr from the common foodstuffs, he wanted to make matters easy for them; silver and gold money were rare means of dealings among the Arabs and the majority of people did not own but a few coins. Moreover, the poor were in dire need of the common foodstuffs, such as wheat, dates, raisins, and cheese. Thus, giving Zakatul-Fitr from the staple food was easy for the payer and beneficial for the recipient. Also, he (peace and blessings be upon him) permitted the owners of camels and sheep to give cheese as Zakatul-Fitr in order to facilitate matters for them.

Furthermore, the purchasing power of money varies from one time to another and from one country to another. Thus, estimating the amount of Zakatul-Fitr by a fixed amount of money would make it fluctuate and be unstable. That is why the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) fixed it by an amount that does not vary or fluctuate. This amount is the Sa`, which is usually considered as sufficient food for one family for a day.

Third, our scholars agreed that fatwas change according to the time, place, and condition of the people involved. The one who impartially examines the current status will realize that giving food as Zakatul-Fitr is only suitable for simple societies in which the poor need grains and the payer finds such grains easily. In the large and complex societies that have a high population density and where grains are rare and the poor do not need them, as they no longer grind, knead, and bake their food, the impartial will agree that paying the value of Zakatul-Fitr as money is more suitable.

Imam Ibn Taymiyah did well when he permitted the Muslim who had sold the fruits of his land for some dirhams to pay the tenth of these dirhams and not to be asked to buy fruits to just to give them to the poor. Also, he permitted the owner of the camels who was obliged to give a sheep as Zakah to pay the value in money and did not ask him to travel to another city to buy a sheep. This is true fiqh (understanding of Shariah).

Then how can we ask a Muslim in a city like Cairo, where more than 10 million Muslims live, to give grain that has become rare and is of no need to the poor as Zakatul-Fitr? There is a big difference between the one who has a stock of food and refrains from giving the poor and the one like a city dweller who has nothing but money and is just to the poor. Zakatul-Fitr was made obligatory in order to help the poor and make them not need to go from one place to another seeking food on the day of [Eid](#) while the rich enjoy their wealth with their children.

One should ask oneself, “Would he make a poor person not need to go to the market if he gives him a Sa of dates or barley in a city like Cairo, for example?” Of course not, as the poor will surely go to market to sell them to obtain money to buy suitable food for their families! Thus, some of the Muslim scholars took into consideration the objectives involved and permitted giving Zakatul-Fitr from the common foodstuffs of the country; this food is not even listed in the Shariah.”

Conclusion

Zakatul-Fitr plays a critical role in Islamic practice during Ramadan by ensuring the fast is valid, supporting the poor, and strengthening community ties. Whether paid in food or its monetary equivalent, this obligatory charity remains a cornerstone of Islamic faith and social responsibility.