

Foundations of Zakat Al-Fitr in Islam

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FOUNDATION

Every Muslim is required to pay Zakat-ul-Fitr at the conclusion of the month of Ramadan as a token of thankfulness to God for having enabled him to observe fasts. Imam Tirmidi reported in his Sunan that Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him) said: "Remember! Zakat al-Fitr is Wajib (strongly recommended) on every Muslim, man or woman, free or in servitude, adult or child."

SIGNIFICANCE

Literal meaning of Zakat (or Zakah) is the process of purification. Fitr is from the word Fitrah and its literal meaning is (one's) nature or natural state. Therefore, the meaning of Zakat al-Fitr is to purify one's nature.

PURPOSE

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-ul-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."

Ibn Abbas (ra) reported that the Prophet (Peace be Upon Him) made the Zakat al-Fitr obligatory for the purpose of: purifying our fasting from vain talk and shameful mistakes, to make arrangements for the poor and the needy for food and clothing (for the festival of Eid). (Hadith: Abu Dawud, Ibn Maja)

WHO SHOULD PAY?

Every free adult 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, **MUST** pay Zakat-ul-Fitr for himself/herself and all his/her dependents. Even those who did not fast should pay it. Zakat al-Fitr should also be paid for the child born or the person died before the Fajr (dawn) on the day of Eid.

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 honor of giving in charity.

HOW MUCH SHOULD BE PAID?

At the time of the Prophet (saw), payment of Zakat al-Fitr was made in terms of weight of grain. It is one Sa' for each person. One Sa approximately equals to 3.15 kg or 6.94 lbs. The Muslim jurists agree that Zakat al-Fitr can also be paid in cash equivalent to the cost of 3.15kg/6.94 lb. of grain including rice, wheat, lentils, corn, and dry cheese.

WHEN TO PAY?

Prophet Muhammad (saw) has said, "Whoever paid it (Zakat al-Fitr) before Salat al-Eid, it is acceptable Zakat before Allah. Whoever paid it after Salat-ul-Eid, it is just a charity." The companion of the Prophet (ra) used to pay it a few days earlier. (Hadith: Bukhari)

Imam Shafi'i held the opinion that Zakat al-Fitr can be paid as early as the beginning of Ramadan. I recommend that Zakat al-Fitr should be paid early enough so it will reach the needy and the poor before the Eid day. It will enable them to use it for food and clothes and give them the opportunity to enjoy the happiness of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Sheikh Al-Qaradawi explains that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, used to pay Zakat-ul-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-ul-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.

WHO SHOULD BE PAID?

Zakat al-Fitr should be paid directly to the needy and the poor. However, you can also pay it to an organization, which would distribute it in accordance with the teaching of Islam. Remember! It is still your responsibility. So, make sure before paying that the organization will distribute it according to the teaching of Islam and before Salat-ul-Eid.

Year after year Zakat is sent to deserving persons in the Muslim World. Let's try to spend some of it in our own communities including Moaliful Qoloob, non-Muslims to turn their hearts and minds as friends of our communities. This will require knowing our own communities and friendly and deserving non-Muslims. It may be difficult at first but it will be better for us.

HOW TO CALCULATE ZAKAT AL-FITR?

Zakat al-fitr is a flat amount per household member paid by the head of the household for himself and his or her dependents. It is estimated for ten US dollars (\$10) per person. It should be paid no later than the eid-al-fitr. For example, a married person with three children should add

the number of his household and multiply by \$10. The total amount is thus calculated:
 $5 \times 10 = \$50$.