

beaker, a unit of measurement about two kilos and forty grams) of dates, on a bondsman, a freeman, on every man and woman, young and old...”

This citation indicates that the eligible people who should give these alms, are virtually every living Muslim, provided he or she possesses more than the prescribed amount of provisions, in such a way that, after giving alms, there will remain enough food for him and his family for at least 24 hours.

However, there is no obligation of these alms on the unborn fetus, unless the parents or the guardian wants to give on its behalf voluntary alms. The Leader of the Faithful, `Umar (raa), gave for the unborn.

Thus, it is incumbent on every able believer to give for himself, and for those that he is responsible for; wife and children, and next of kin if they cannot give for themselves. If they can give, it is better that they do so, because every believer is commanded to do so.

In the event that the person does not possess the amount, almsgiving is not mandatory. But, if he possesses half of the amount, it should be given. Allah (SWT) states:

“So fear Allah as much as you can...”

(Al-Qur`an 64:16)

And the Messenger of Allah said:

“If I command you with something, do it as much as you can.” (Agreed upon)

Spiritual Reasons for These Alms

The wisdom behind this obligation is, among other things, to extend a benevolent helping hand to needy Muslims so that they will not have to beg from their fellow wealthier believers

on this happiest occasion of the year in a Muslim's life - Ramadan fast culminates with the festivity of *`Eid Prayer*.

On the other hand, it helps the faster cleanse his fast from any shortcoming, or un-Islamic act during Ramadan. It is also to express gratitude to Allah for helping the servant live through another Ramadan. In a hadith reported by Ibn Abbas (raa) he said:

“The Messenger of Allah (saas) has mandated the obligation of fast breaking alms as a cleanser of the faster from (what one may have done) mistakes or obscene acts, and to provide for the poor. Whoever gives it before `Eid prayer, it is an accepted alms, but whoever gives it after Eid prayer, it is only a charity like any ordinary charity.” (Abu Dawud)

What Should be Given?

Unlike regular *Zakaat*, the item recommended for giving is foodstuff: dates, wheat, barley, rice, oats, raisins, or any food stuff that can be stored naturally. Indeed, any type of food that is a staple in a given region of the vast Muslim world will do. If the staple is rice, you give rice, if it is dates or raisins, you give dates and raisins, etc.

In a hadith related by Bukhari and Muslim, by the way of `Abdullah bin `Umar (raa), he said:

“The Messenger of Allah has established the fast breaking alms of Ramadan, *sa'a*, a beaker of dates, or a beaker of barley, and barley was then part of our food.”

This hadith has been corroborated by another report by Abu Sa'eed Al-Khudri (raa) who said:

“We used to give during the time of the Messenger a *sa'a*, a beaker of food, and our food was barley, raisins, dry milk, and dates.” (Bukhari)

Thus, for these alms, items like cloth, cash money or currency, furniture, dishes and general goods are not accepted by Allah.

A *sa'a* (beaker) equivalent will not do. In so much as nothing else will substitute for these alms as a medium of giving, the monetary equivalent of the cost of a staple food will not be acceptable. For giving money, instead of food, is contrary to what the Messenger (saas) commanded. In a hadith, related by the mother of the believers, 'Aisha (raa) the Prophet (saas) said:

“He who innovates something in this matter of ours, that is not of it, will have it rejected.” (Bukhari and Muslim)

In Muslim's report of the hadith, the Messenger (saas) said:

“He who does an act which our matter is not (in agreement) with will have it rejected.”

According to these two citations, to give money as Zakatul-Fitr is an innovation and not proper, nor is it in accord with the prescribed worship, '*ebadah*. Alms giving is an act of worship, prescribed for a special item, food at a special time, i.e., before Eid prayer. The opinion of giving a monetary equivalent is reported from Imam Abu Hanifah (raa) who did not really have a proof, except *ijtihad*. There is no *ijtihad* where there is a text. After all, all the Imams, including Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Shafi'e, Imam Malik, and Imam Ahmad said:

“If they say something that contradicts the established command of the Messenger of Allah, their saying should be discarded.”

Sometimes the advocates of money as a substitute for food make us think there was no money during the time of the

Prophet. To the contrary, there was money currency known as “*dirham*” and “*dinaar*.” Giving monetary equivalents as fast-breaking alms relegates this act to a secret charity, rather than alms given as a religious ceremony (*Sha'eerah*), which is to be observed publicly among the Muslims in a way that everybody in Muslim households, young and old, will participate in and bear witness to this extraordinary event of purchasing, weighing, and distributing food items among the needy faithful. This undoubtedly is one of the intents of the Lawgiver, a special cultural phenomenon unique to Islam and Muslims.

The evidence and wisdom behind giving food is more compelling than giving money. However, if the believer desires to help the needy more, giving money along with the prescribed food, is excellent and will be rewarded by Allah.

The Amount To be Given

As for the amount to be given, it is a *sa'a*, (a prophetic beaker) which is equal to about two kilos and forty grams. In pounds it is about five pounds per believer. If you want to know the prophetic *sa'a*, beaker, you weigh five pounds or two kilos and forty grams.

Put the weight in a beaker, jar or vessel and notice the level. You then use that as your *sa'a* to weigh the rest of your alms.

Better yet, a *sa'a*, can be purchased at a very reasonable price all over the Muslim world; if you happen to be in Makkah for Hajj or 'Umrah, you may purchase one or have someone who goes there to purchase it for you.

Time of Zakatul-Fitr

Giving these alms is mandatory after sunset on the eve of *'Eidul - Fitr*. If a Muslim expires seconds before sunset, it is

not mandatory for his next of kin to give on his behalf. But if he expires seconds after sunset, alms should be given on his behalf. So is the case of the newly born.

As for the time it should be given, there are two time periods: The best and optional times. The best time is the morning of *`Eidul - Fitr* before prayer. In a Hadith related by Ibn 'Umar (raa),

“The Messenger of Allah (saas) commanded the Muslims to give alms when fastbreaking people leave for Eid prayer.” (Muslim and others)

In his commentary on the following verse, Ibn 'Uyainah said:

“But those will prosper who purify them (give alms) and glorify the name of their guardian Lord and pray.”

He said: the word “*tazakka*”, purify or giving alms, comes before the word “*Salla*”, prayer. This is why it is better to delay *`Eidul-Fitr* prayer so that the believers will have enough time to give their alms.

The optional time to give alms is one or two days before *`Eid*, that is on the 28th and 29th day of Ramadan. Legally, you have these three days to give your alms. But it should not be delayed past *`Eid* prayer. In that case, *Zakatul-Fitr* is not valid unless there is a reason, as mentioned earlier in the Hadith of Ibn Abbas (raa).

But if there is a compelling reason, such as *`Eid* occurring in a place where there is no food to be purchased, or the food is bought, but there is no one to receive it, or the news about *Eid* comes late in the morning and one does not have enough time to buy the alms, or he depends on someone to give his *Zakat* on his behalf, and the person forgets. In these instances, the alms can be given after *`Eid* because of the valid excuse.

The alms should reach its recipients before `Eid prayer, not after. The beneficiaries should physically have it in their possession. If you intend to give alms to someone and he cannot be found, it should be given to someone else, so that you do not miss the time.

Place In Which Alms Should Be Given

The alms should be given in at the place where the Ramadan ends for the faster, home or abroad. If you happen to be in Makkah, Medina or Cairo you give it to the needy Muslims of that area.

If there are more poor Muslims in a given place, or there is no one who deserves the alms in your area, or you do not know anyone, you may deputize someone to give it on your behalf in a different country where Muslims are in need.

The Recipients of the Alms

The recipients of this Zakaat are the needy Muslims and those in debt. They should be given according to their needs. In a hadith by Ibn `Umar (raa) the Prophet said: “Make them self sufficient on this day...” (*Dar Qutni*) It may be given to more than one needy person, or all may be given to one person.

Redemption of Ramadan

When a faster misses a day or days due to valid reasons mentioned previously, they should be redeemed after Ramadan. The redemption is mandatory, not immediately but delayed mandatory, known as “*wajib 'at-Tarakhi.*” Although by this jurisprudential principle, there is a period of eleven months to complete your Ramadan, it is preferred to make up these missed days as soon as possible, for Allah (SWT) says:

“...Then strive together (as in a race) towards all that is good...”

(Al-Qur`an, 2:148)

This verse indicates hastening to offer deeds is preferred for that is in the spirit of completing your Ramadan, and absolving the faster of the liability of unfasted days, rather than have it drag on for eleven months. After all, there is a possibility of death and missing the days altogether, as a result.

If there is reason to delay it, it is permitted to delay it no later than before the next Ramadan, or no later than the number of days he missed before the next Ramadan. If he missed five days, they should be redeemed not later than five days before the next Ramadan.

In an authenticated hadith attributed to 'Aishah (raa), she used to make up missed days in the month of *Sha'aban*, a month before Ramadan. If you miss more than one day you have the option to make them up consecutively or separately. Allah (SWT) states:

“ Fasting is for a fixed number of days. But if any of you is ill or on a journey, the missed number (of days) should be redeemed from days later....”

(Al-Qur`an, 2:187)

Thus, one who is ill or travels during Ramadan and does not fast, should fast days later to cover the ones missed, either in a group, all five days together, observed from Monday through Friday, or spread the five days over a whole month.

In a hadith related by Ibn 'Umar (raa), the Messenger of Allah said, referring to the redeeming of missed Ramadan fasts:

“If he pleases, he redeems separately or consecutively.”

(Dar-Qutni)

No one should delay the making up of his missed days until next Ramadan, unless there is a valid reason. In this event, one should fast the present Ramadan, then make up the days missed in the previous Ramadan as soon as possible before the next Ramadan.

Fasting on Behalf of the Deceased

We know that when a person who dies did not make Salaat, no one should pray on his behalf, nor should anyone fast on behalf of a person who could not observe fast. But if an able person dies before he completes Ramadan, no one need fast on his behalf, according to the majority of the scholars, but his next of kin should expiate on his behalf by feeding one person for each day that was missed.

According to others, if the person dies before completing the missed days or before he makes up his oath (*nadhira*) the fast becomes mandatory and his or her next of kin must fast to make and expiate on his behalf. They cited a hadith reported by many, including Ahmed, Bukhari and Muslim in which the Messenger of Allah, said as reported by his wife, 'Aishah (raa):

“He who dies while there is upon him the obligation of fast, his next of kin (“Wali”), fast on his behalf.”

No fasting is mandatory on the deceased's family if he dies in the middle of Ramadan.

In another report by Ibn Abbas (raa), he said:

“A man came to the Messenger of Allah and asked him, ‘Oh Messenger of Allah, my mother passed away and upon her is the obligation of fast, should I make it up?’ The Prophet (saas) responded: ‘If your mother was indebted, would you pay back her debt?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ The Prophet (saas), then said, the debt of Allah is worthy of paying.’ ”

These authenticated citations are evidence that redeeming the fast, interrupted by death, became mandatory upon the relatives of the deceased.

Muslims Near the North or South Pole

Muslims who live close to the North or South Pole, where there are long nights expanding over six months, or where the days expand over six months respectively, should fast by using the time zone of the country nearest to them.