

79337 - Can Zakah Be Given in the Form of Food?

the question

In past years the month of Ramadan has become the month of paying Zakah, and it started to be paid in the form of staple foods and other necessary items. This year we found out that Zakah on wealth must be given in the form of cash to be distributed in the manner prescribed. My question is in two parts:

1 - What is the ruling on the way we gave Zakah in previous years by buying staple foods and essential items for the poor, and not giving cash? Were we sinning by being unaware of that? What should we do now?

2 - In some poor families if we give them cash, the head of the household takes it and deprives the family of it so that he can buy cigarettes or satellite dishes, or go on trips, so we find that we have no choice but to buy what is needed in the house and not hand over cash, so that we can be sure that this family will benefit from it and their needs will be met. What is the ruling on that?

Summary of answer

It is permissible to give Zakah in the form of goods such as fabric, food and so on, if it seems that this will serve the interests of those who are entitled to Zakah.

Detailed answer

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Must Zakah be given in the form of the wealth on which it is being paid?

The basic principle is that Zakah must be given in the form of the wealth on which Zakah is being paid, so Zakah on cash must be given in cash, and Zakah on animals must be given in animals, and Zakah on crops must be given in crops, except [Zakah on trade goods](#) which may be given from the value of the goods or from [the trade goods](#) themselves.

Can you pay Zakah in a form of wealth other than that on which it is being paid?

The scholars differed as to whether it is permissible to pay Zakah in a form of wealth other than that on which Zakah is being paid, which is known to the scholars as paying the value of Zakah. The correct view is that it is not permissible to pay the value of Zakah (in another form of wealth).

But, because there is such a strong difference of scholarly opinion concerning this issue, we hope that there is no sin on you for giving the value of Zakah in past years, but you have to give it in the same form as the wealth on which Zakah is being paid in future years.

Can Zakah be given in the form of food?

If the poor person is foolish and does not handle money well, then some scholars have stated that it is permissible to give him Zakah in the form of [specific goods](#) rather than cash, based on what is in the best interests of the poor person and so as to meet his needs.

Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said in *Majmu` Al-Fatawa* (25/82):

“As for paying the value of [Zakah](#), expiation and so on, the well known view of Malik and Ash-Shafi'i is that it is not permissible, but according to Abu Hanifah it is permissible. Ahmad (may Allah have mercy on him) disallowed giving the value in some cases and

permitted it in others. The most correct view concerning this is that paying the value when there is no need to do so and when no interests are served thereby is not allowed.

As for paying the value when there is a need to do so, or when there is an interest to be served or it is just to do so, there is nothing wrong with that, such as if a man sells the fruits of his garden or his crops for cash, then pays one tenth of the cash, that will be acceptable and he does not have to go to the trouble of buying fruits or wheat if he has given the poor the equivalent value. Ahmad stated that this is permissible. Or if those who are entitled to Zakah ask him to give them the equivalent value because that is more useful to them, then he may give it to them.”

Shaykh Ibn Baz (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“It is also permissible to give instead of cash goods such as fabric, food and so on, if it seems that this will serve the interests of those who are entitled to Zakah, based on the equivalent value, such as if the poor person is insane or lacking in reason or foolish or immature, and there is the fear that he would squander the money and it is better to give him food or clothing of equivalent value rather than Zakah in the form of cash. All of this is mentioned in the more correct scholarly opinion.” (Majmu` Fatawa wa Maqalat Ash-Shaykh Ibn Baz, 14/253)

He was also asked about buying food and other items such as blankets and clothes, and giving them to the poor, especially in cases where there is not enough food available at affordable prices in that country.

He replied: “There is no reason why that should not be done, after ascertaining that they will be given to Muslims.” (Majmu` Fatawa wa Maqalat Ash-Shaykh Ibn Baz, 14/246)

The Standing Committee for Issuing Fatwas was asked: We would like to find out from you about giving [Zakah](#) money to buy various kinds of food and buying food and other items such as blankets and clothes, and giving them to the poor, especially in cases where there is not enough food available at affordable prices in that country, or it may not be available at all, and even when it is available, the price is many times greater than the cost of buying

the food elsewhere and sending it to them. We hope that you can advise us, may Allah reward you with good.

They replied: “If the matter is as described, then there is nothing wrong with that, based on the interests of those who are entitled to it.” (From Fatawa Al-Lajnah Ad-Da’imah, 9/433)

We ask Allah to help and guide us and you in word and in deed.

And Allah knows best.