

CAN ZAKAT AL-FITR BE PAID IN CASH?

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Can Zakāt Al-Fitr Be Paid in Cash?

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



Question: Can Zakāt Al-Fitr be given in cash?

No, Zakāt Al-Fitr can't be given in cash. Giving it in cash renders it an ordinary charity, not Zakāt Al-Fitr, because you didn't follow the proper rules for this 'Ibādah. It must be given in food the way the Messenger ﷺ specified it. If you've given it in cash this year, you still have some time to amend the mistake by giving it properly, because the proper timing for Zakāt Al-Fitr is one or two days before the end of Ramadān, and the best timing for it is after sunset on the last day of Ramadān all the way until right before Salāt Al-'Eid. Giving Zakāt Al-Fitr after Salāt Al-'Eid is another mistake that renders this an ordinary charity and not Zakāt Al-Fitr. Keep in mind though, if you give cash to a trustworthy relative or trustworthy person or a trustworthy organization, and you delegate to them the task of buying food for poor people on your behalf, that's permissible. That's not considered giving it in cash because the poor person is receiving food, not the money. You're just delegating the task to someone else to do it on your behalf, and that's permissible.

In matters like this, you tend to always hear the argument that *"some Shaykh allowed it"* or *"some Shaykh said it's permissible"*, and that's very similar to what I mentioned pertaining to the earlier question about whether a Wali is required for Nikāh or not. Sincere Ulamā' who do the best in their Ijtihād with what they have of proof and they side the truth in that, they're rewarded inshā'Allāh, but you're not rewarded for following what they sided the truth in if you know that they're wrong in it. Using that argument — that some Ulamā' said it's okay — on this specific matter, is over a thousand years old. And that argument can be dismantled by a statement from Imām Ahmad رحمه الله تعالى on this specific matter, and it can be used for other similar Fiqhi Masā'il. Imām Ahmad رحمه الله تعالى said you can't give cash for Zakāt Al-Fitr. Someone told him, *"But 'Umar Ibn 'Abd Al-'Azīz allowed it."* Imām Ahmad رحمه الله تعالى said, *"They leave the saying of the Messenger ﷺ and they say so-and-so said it's permissible."* Then he mentioned Hadīth Ibn 'Umar on this matter, the Hadīth that's in Sahīh Al-

Bukhāri and Muslim, that the Messenger ﷺ prescribed Zakāt Al-Fitr as one Sā' of dates and one Sā' of barley.

فَرَضَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ زَكَاةَ الْفِطْرِ صَاعًا مِنْ تَمْرٍ أَوْ صَاعًا مِنْ شَعِيرٍ

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) prescribed Zakāt Al-Fitr one Sā' of dates or one Sā' of barley...¹

And then Imām Ahmad recited,

وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ

Obey Allāh and obey the Messenger...²

That's absolutely all that needs to be said on this matter. That statement by Imām Ahmad رحمه الله تعالى is all that needs to be said on this matter. It should stop right here. Ash-Shāfi'ī رحمه الله تعالى said that it's by Ijmā' that if the Sunnah becomes apparent and clear to someone, they can't leave it to the saying of anyone else. Giving Zakāt Al-Fitr in food is what the Messenger ﷺ clearly ordered.

فَرَضَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ زَكَاةَ الْفِطْرِ صَاعًا مِنْ تَمْرٍ أَوْ صَاعًا مِنْ شَعِيرٍ

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) prescribed Zakāt Al-Fitr one Sā' of dates or one Sā' of barley...³

¹ Muslim: 984b

² [5:92]

³ Muslim: 984b

What's the meaning of the Messenger ﷺ specifying a Sā' of dates and Sā' of barley if that's not what's intended? The Messenger ﷺ clarified what's obligatory — Zakāt Al-Fitr is obligatory. Then, he specified what's obligatory. Specification indicates you must adhere to what he specified, otherwise, mentioning those items would have no purpose and no meaning. And if cash was allowed, the Messenger ﷺ would have added at the end, *"or you can give their value in cash."* It was the understanding of the best generation, the first generation, the Sahābah رضي الله عنهم — who had the purest, best understanding of this Dīn — it was their understanding to give Zakāt Al-Fitr in food. Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما gave a speech saying, *"Sadaqat Al-Fitr is a Sā' of food."* We don't know anyone who stood up and said, *"No, Ibn 'Abbās. You're wrong."* Abu Sā'id Al-Khudri said, *"We used to give a Sā' of food."*

كَمَا نُخْرِجُ زَكَاةَ الْفِطْرِ صَاعًا مِنْ طَعَامٍ أَوْ صَاعًا مِنْ شَعِيرٍ أَوْ صَاعًا مِنْ تَمْرٍ أَوْ صَاعًا مِنْ أَقِطٍ أَوْ صَاعًا مِنْ زَبِيبٍ

We used to take out as the Zakāt Al-Fitr one Sā' of grain, or one Sā' of barley or one Sā' of dates, or one Sā' of cheese or one Sā' of raisins.⁴

We used to give Zakāt Al-Fitr as one Sā' of food or one Sā' of Sha'ir (which is barley) or one Sā' of Tamr (which is dates) or one Sā' of Aqit (cottage cheese), or a Sā' of Zabīb (which is dried grapes). That's what they gave for Zakāt Al-Fitr. One needs to understand the basic principle/rule about 'Ibādāt in order to understand this specific issue. Zakāt Al-Fitr is classified as an 'Ibādah. It's a worship. Acts of worship are Tawqīfiyyah. العبادات توقيفية. That means they can only come to us from the Shar'ī text, the Qur'ān and Sunnah, and they must be performed according to how they were prescribed upon us, because Islām is complete.

⁴ Muslim: 985a

الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ

This day I have perfected for you your religion...⁵

There's nothing that draws one closer to Jannah and distances one from Jahannam except that it's been explained to us. The One who legislated this mighty, great act of worship is the All-Wise, the All-Aware. He's the All-Knowing of the conditions of His servants and what's best for them.

أَلَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ خَلَقَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ

Does He who created not know, while He is the Subtle, the Aware?⁶

The proofs show that the Messenger ﷺ explained to us that Zakāt Al-Fitr should be given in food. Making Ijtihād in a matter like this — making the Ijtihād to replace the food with cash — is making Ijtihād in a matter that has clear proof on it, and that's opposing the proof. And the Messenger ﷺ told us

مَنْ عَمِلَ عَمَلًا لَيْسَ عَلَيْهِ أَمْرُنَا فَهُوَ رَدٌّ

He who did any act for which there is no sanction from our behalf, that is to be rejected.⁷

Whoever does an act that we haven't commanded, it's rejected. And the circumstances during the Messenger ﷺ's time are similar to our circumstances in

⁵ [5:3]

⁶ [67:14]

⁷ Muslim: 1718b

this matter. They had poor people, and we have poor people. They had cash, we have cash. There were poor people during the Messenger ﷺ's time who needed to feed themselves and their animals, they needed shelter and housing, and they needed dowry to get married. They also had gold and silver coins as currency back then. Follow along with me to get the point that I'm trying to make. They had poor people with needs like we have today. They had currency, we have currency. And the Messenger ﷺ is described as,

إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ

*It is not but a revelation revealed.*⁸

He's revelation that's revealed, and he was given the specialty of Jawāmi' Al-Kalam — he would give short expressions that carried the widest meanings. He could've said one should give a Sā' of dates or a Sā' of barley for Zakāt Al-Fitr, or their equivalent in gold or silver, but we don't have a single authentic, Marfū' narration by the Messenger ﷺ where he allowed anything other than food. In fact, it would have been permissible to give cash if the Messenger ﷺ permitted it once only, or if he saw someone giving Zakāt Al-Fitr in gold or silver once and didn't object, or if he knew of it being given in gold or silver and didn't say anything, or of course, if he approved it, but none of that ever happened. So let me summarize that point. When the poor people back then had the needs that poor people today have, they had currency back then that we have, yet the Messenger ﷺ didn't mention cash as an option, we practice that 'Ibādah exactly as the Messenger ﷺ taught us.

Some say the poor need money instead of food, so we should give it to them as money. What you need to understand is that Islām is an entire system. It left nothing out. They allege in argument for giving cash, they say, *"The poor person doesn't need food today. He needs help with his rent and clothes, he needs*

⁸ [53:4]

help rebuilding his house, so we give him cash.” That’s great, give him cash! But that comes from another budget — the budget of Zakāt Al-Māl, not Zakāt Al-Fitr. Pull that out of your 2.5% Zakāt Al-Māl and give it to that poor person for rent, marriage, shelter, and so on. Or pull it from the general Sadaqah that’s recommended in the Qur’ān and the Sunnah. Give it to him from that, not from the Zakāt Al-Fitr. If you work for a company, you know they have budgets. They have budgets and they have accounts for various types of expenditures. They have budgets for wages, for rent, for equipment, for marketing and advertising, for maintenance and supplies. If an accountant or employee uses an account dedicated for wages to pay for maintenance, that has its own account and budget, he’s going to have issues with his boss. Eventually, it’s going to be a financially disorganized company, and it may go bankrupt. Allāh سبحانه وتعالى has the most supreme examples. He gave us the infallible guidance to live by and we must apply it according to how He ordered us. Zakāt Al-Fitr is for the purpose that the Messenger ﷺ specified it for.

وَطُعْمَةً لِلْمَسْكِينِ

...and to feed the poor.⁹

Food for the poor. That in and of itself is proof that it must be food. **وَطُعْمَةً لِلْمَسْكِينِ**. The wisdom behind it is food for the poor. Zakāt Al-Fitr is consoling the poor person on the ‘Eid to relieve them from the humiliation of asking for food on the day of ‘Eid or the three days after that, so he can spend his joyous day and days after that with food for himself and his family without having to ask others for it. Zakāt Al-Mal is a different resource that Allāh سبحانه وتعالى established for other needs that are detailed in Surat At-Tawbah in verse sixty. You can use *that* budget for other purposes.

⁹ Ibn Mājah: 1827

إِنَّمَا الصَّدَقَتُ لِلْفُقَرَاءِ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْعَمَلِينَ عَلَيْهَا وَالْمُؤَلَّفَةِ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَالْغَرَمِينَ وَفِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
وَأَبْنِ السَّبِيلِ

As-Sadaqāt are only for the Fuqarā' (poor), and Al-Masākīn (the poor) and those employed to collect (the funds), and to attract the hearts of those who have been inclined (towards Islām), and to free the captives, and for those in debt, and for Allāh's Cause (i.e. for Mujāhidūn - those fighting in a holy battle), and for the wayfarer (a traveler who is cut off from everything)...¹⁰

You also have another option. Sadaqat At-Tatawu', the greatly encouraged charities that are recommended in the Qur'ān and Sunnah. You can use that to give the poor person. The needs of the poor are diverse, so 'Allām Al-Ghuyūb ordered various types of Zakāh to make sure the poor people get what satisfies all their various needs. If you say, "But they need clothes instead of food, they need to rebuild their houses," no doubt about that. Get that from the right budget.

Also, something to keep in mind is that Zakāt Al-Fitr is a symbol of Ramadān. It's a Sha'īrah of this Dīn. When I was younger in Madīnah, in the last few days before Ramadān was over, they would set up temporary stands all over the city to sell Muslims a Sā' of the food that they're supposed to give Zakāh in and it was a beautiful sight to see. People buying that Sā' of food and then you would see them driving and walking in neighborhoods passing it out. I'm not sure if it's still like that or not, but it was such a beautiful symbol to see. When you give that Zakāh in cash, that buries that beautiful, seasonal, Ramadānic symbol. And a final thought on this matter is that all the Ulamā' of Ahl As-Sunnah, from the beginning to the end, agree that if you give this Zakāh in food it's accepted. There's no dispute on that. The Ulamā' dispute whether it can be given in cash as I've explained, and I explained what's correct. Why would you leave what has no doubt to that which has doubt? The Messenger ﷺ said leave what's doubtful to

¹⁰ [9:60]

that which is not doubtful, and you flip it around by giving the Zakāt Al-Fitr in cash.