Qs and As re Eid al-Fitr - 4 /Jun/ 2019

Questions and Answers regarding Precepts pertaining to Eid al-Fitr

Paying Zakāt al-Fiṭrah in the Form of Money rather than Goods

Q.1| In submitting zakāt al-fiṭrah,[1] are we allowed to pay money instead of such staples as wheat, barley, and rice?

A.| Yes, it is permissible.

Transferring Zakāt al-Fiṭrah to Poor Persons Living outside One's Town or City

Q.2| Can we pay our zakāt al-fiṭrah to poor people living outside our town or in a different town or city?

A.| Paying zakāt al-fiṭrah in a town or city other than the one in which one resides is permissible. However, if on Eid al-Fitr one has set aside zakāt al-fiṭrah to pay to the poor, assuming that there are poor individuals in his town to which one could offer zakāt al-fiṭrah, it is—as a matter of mandatory caution—impermissible to transfer zakāt al-fiṭrah to the poor in a different town or city.

Paying Zakāt al-Fiṭrah to Non-Shias

Q.3| Can we pay our zakāt al-fiṭrah to poor people that are not Shia?

A.| So long as there are poor Twelver Shias (al-shīʿah al-ithnā ʿasharīyyah), it is impermissible to offer zakāt al-fiṭrah to the poor who do not adhere to the Twelver Shia faith.[2]

Paying Zakāt al-Fiṭrah on behalf of Guests

Q.4| What is our religious duty vis-à-vis guests that spend the night preceding Eid al-Fitr at our house? Does the host pay zakāt al-fiṭrah on behalf of such guests?

A.| The host is not responsible for the zakāt al-fiṭrah of guests who spend the night preceding Eid al-Fitr at his house.

The Zakāt al-Fiṭrah of a Working Woman

Q.5| If a woman helps with the family expenses because her husband is incapable of meeting the family needs, who pays zakāt al-fiṭrah for the family?

A.| So long as a woman is considered a dependent[3] of her husband, he pays their zakāt al-fiṭrah if he is financially capable. If, however, she is not his dependent nor that of anyone else, she must pay her own zakāt al-fiṭrah.

The Duty of the Family of a Man Who Neglects to Pay Zakāt al-Fiṭrah

Q.6| If a man fails to pay zakāt al-fiṭrah, how does this affect his wife and children?

A.| His wife and children have no particular obligation in this relation and thus need not pay zakāt al-fiṭrah.

When Submitting Zakāt al-Fiṭrah to Its Recipients Becomes Due

Q.7| When does zakāt al-fiṭrah become due?

A.| Once the appearance of the new moon of the month of Shawwāl has been ascertained (on the night preceding Eid al-Fitr), one may set aside the amount of goods or money one must pay as zakāt al-fiṭrah. If one is planning to attend the Eid al-Fitr Prayer, one must, as a matter of mandatory caution, submit the amount due, or at least set it aside, prior to performing the prayer. If one does not plan to attend the Eid al-Fitr Prayer, one has until noontime to pay zakāt al-fiṭrah or to at least set it aside.

Paying Zakāt al-Fiṭrah prior to Eid al-Fitr

Q.8| Presuming there are people in another country who are more in need than those that are in the country of our residence, is it permissible to pay zakāt al-fiṭrah a few days early so that it may reach the recipients in the foreign country on time? Also, can we ask someone who lives in that country to pay zakāt al-fiṭrah to the qualified recipients on our behalf, and then reimburse him later when we meet?

A.| It is permissible to ask someone to function as one's representative (wakīl) in paying zakāt al-fiṭrah to the poor on one's behalf. As to the time of submitting zakāt al-fiṭrah, it is—as a matter of mandatory caution—invalid to pay it during the month of Ramadan.[4] It is, however, permissible to grant the amount that one will have to pay as zakāt al-fiṭrah to a qualified recipient during the month of Ramadan as a loan, and then when the beginning of the month of Shawwāl has been ascertained, one can forfeit the loan as payment for zakāt al-fiṭrah.

Forgetting to Pay Zakāt al-Fiṭrah

Q.9| What do we do if we forget to pay zakāt al-fiṭrah?

A.| If you have set aside the amount due prior to noontime on Eid al-Fitr but have forgotten to pay it to the qualified recipient, you need only to submit the amount you have set aside. But if you have not even set aside the amount due, you must—as a matter of mandatory caution—pay your zakāt al-fiṭrah to the qualified recipient, but your intention in doing so should simply be to seek proximity to God (qurbatan ilā allāh), without distinguishing it as a timely action (adā') or an overdue action whose time has passed (qaḍā').

Paying Zakāt al-Fiṭrah to One's Dependents

Q.10| Can a father pay his zakāt al-fiṭrah and that of his family to his son or daughter who is a college student and in financial need?

A.| If one's children are in financial need (faqīr), the parents are obligated to pay their expenses, but it is impermissible to pay zakāt al-fiṭrah to cover their necessary daily expenses, for which the parents are responsible. If, however, they have necessary expenses for which the parents are not responsible, such as if they have a debt or a need that is critical to their lives but that is not the parents' responsibility, parents may offer their zakāt al-fiṭrah to their children to be used specifically for these expenses.

[1] Zakāt al-fiṭrah (also referred to as zakāt al-fiṭr, fiṭrah, or fiṭrīyyah) is an annual religious tax that becomes due every Eid al-Fitr. Every adult (bāligh, i.e., one who has reached the age of puberty) individual who is sane, conscious, and possessed of sufficient financial means (ghanī) is duty-bound to pay this tax for himself and for his dependents—all those whose livelihood depends on him. Zakāt al-fiṭrah is payable to poor Shia believers. The amount of the tax is three kilos of such common staples as rice, wheat, and barley or their monetary equivalent per person. Thus, the male breadwinner of a family of four must pay twelve kilos of the aforementioned goods or the monetary equivalent to the poor.

[2] Note that this does not mean that Shias are prohibited from giving in charity to non-Shias who are in need. Rather, this answer pertains only to the recipients of the religious tax of zakāt al-fiṭrah.

[3] Dependent (ʿīyāl in Arabic, nānkhur in Farsi) is one who is financially dependent on another person. A man's wife and children are typically seen as his dependents in a traditional family.

[4] Note that the night preceding Eid al-Fitr is considered in Islamic liturgy as the first night of the month of Shawwāl. Generally speaking, as far as Islamic liturgy and canon is concerned, the day ends at nightfall, and so the night belongs to the following day rather than the preceding day. Thus, the first night of the month of Shawwāl, when zakāt al-fiṭrah becomes payable, is the night preceding Eid al-Fitr.