

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

WITH THE NAME OF GOD, MOST GRACIOUS, MOST MERCIFUL

A FATWA ON ZAKAT AL-FITR (“FAST-BREAKING ALMS-GIVING” AT THE END OF RAMADAN) & FOOD BANKS IN THE UK

All Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds. Peace and Blessings of God be upon His Noble Messengers.

1. The “fast-breaking alms-giving” (*zakat al-fitr* or *sadaqat al-fitr*) is a confirmed Islamic tradition at the end of Ramadan, of donating food (in the form of staple foodstuffs) to poor people before Eid prayer in the morning of the day of Eid. The majority of jurists hold that *zakat al-fitr* is compulsory (*fard*), whilst a minority hold that it is a highly-recommended tradition (*sunna*); a small minority even argued that it was abrogated by the full obligation of *zakat*.
2. Any charitable donation may be sent abroad. However, it is a basic Islamic principle, in common with other religions, that “Charity begins at home,” or as the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, expressed it repeatedly, “Begin with your dependants.” (*ibda’ bi man ta’ul*, a sound hadith with several narrations) Thus, it is recommended for Muslims in Britain to distribute their *zakat al-fitr* offerings locally. Furthermore, God and His Prophets repeatedly recommend the rights of neighbours: regarding food, the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, emphatically taught, “By God, they are not trustworthy believers: those who spend the night with stomachs full whilst their neighbours go hungry!”
3. *Zakat al-fitr* is usually given as food items; the Hanafi jurists allowed the giving of cash, but this was with the intention that the poor recipients may use the cash to buy food or other essential items. Therefore, it remains an option to donate *zakat al-fitr* as either food items or cash.
4. The amount of *zakat al-fitr* payable is, per wealthy Muslim head (adult or child), traditionally equal to one *sa’* (approximately 3 litres in volume¹) of the staple food item, or possibly half of one *sa’* (approximately 1.5 litres) for more expensive foodstuffs.² One *sa’* equates to the following approximate weight of common UK staple foods: rice 2.5kg, flour 2kg, pasta 1kg, porridge (porage) oats 1kg; by comparison, one *sa’* of dates (not a UK staple food) weighs approximately 2kg.³

¹ Cf. <http://www.bakkah.net/en/zakat-fitr-measurements-saa-three-litres-mudd.htm>

² Cf. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book of *Zakat*, Chapters on *Sadaqat al-Fitr*, Hadiths nos. 1503-1512

³ Note that 3 litres of water weigh exactly 3kg, so this implies that all these foods are less dense (“lighter”) than water. In fact, they are denser than water but the air trapped between the food particles means that 3 litres of food generally weighs less than 3 litres of water (3kg).

5. The retail prices of the above items imply that UK *zakat al-fitr* is approximately £3-£5 per person. Some jurists recommend, to be safe, giving 3kg of staple food, which would be more than one *sa'* in the vast majority of cases of staple food.
6. Alternatively, the *zakat al-fitr* amount was traditionally understood to be the equivalent of food for one or two meals, each meal consisting of one or two *mudds* (one *sa'* = four *mudds*). Since an average, filling meal costs roughly £2.50-5.00 in the UK currently, this approach gives us a similar answer, i.e. *zakat al-fitr* at £2.50-5.00 or £5-10.
7. Traditionally, *zakat al-fitr* was mostly given to poor Muslims: most jurists held that poor people who were not Muslim were not eligible to receive *zakat al-fitr*, since both poverty and Islam were conditions for recipients. But Imam Abu Hanifa and others held that poor *dhimmi*s (non-Muslim People of Scripture, protected by Muslim authorities) were eligible to receive it, since poverty was the only condition for recipients.
8. Since the category of *dhimmi*s was abolished by the Ottoman caliph in 1856 in favour of equal citizenship (*muwatana*) irrespective of faith or religion, and since Muslims comprise only 4-5% of the population of Britain where all citizens are equal, *zakat al-fitr* in the UK may simply go to poor people, irrespective of their religion, faith or belief (or lack thereof).
9. With up to a million annual estimated uses of food banks by people in the UK to complement their situation of poverty, an obvious way for Muslims to distribute their *zakat al-fitr* locally is via their local food banks. Since the recipients do not have to be Muslim, based on the view of Imam Abu Hanifa, this should pose no problem religiously. Food banks based in areas of the UK with Muslim-majority populations, or those run by mosques, are likely to have recipients who are mainly Muslim.
10. Suggestions for the staple foodstuffs of people in the UK include, but are not limited to: bread, potatoes, rice, pasta, cereals, flour, couscous, etc. (Traditionally, *zakat al-fitr* has been given in solid staple foodstuffs, whereas for *fidya* and *kaffara*, bread was prominently given, accompanied by oil, fat, vinegar, meat, etc. – cf. *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* on Qur'an 5:89 & 5:95. Long-life milk and juice is in demand at UK foodbanks, and it is arguable that these liquids are also UK staple foods.)
11. It is thus recommended for wealthy Muslims in the UK who wish to distribute their *zakat al-fitr* to do so either directly to needy families, else via their local food bank, else via cash to a local, national or international charity.
12. May God accept and bless our worship during Ramadan, Eid and all year round, and guide us towards helping to eliminate poverty and unnecessary hunger.

(Sheikh Dr) Usama Hasan: London (UK), 29th Ramadan 1436 / 16th July 2015

APPENDIX: SOME BACKGROUND RESEARCH

1. EXTRACTS FROM THE BOOK OF ZAKAT AL-FITR (“FAST-BREAKING ALMSGIVING”) by IBN RUSHD / AVERROES⁴

Its ruling: The majority of jurists hold that *zakat al-fitr* is compulsory (*fard*).

The ‘Iraqi jurists and some of the later Maliki ones hold that it is a recommended tradition (*sunna*).

Some said that it was abrogated by the obligation of *zakat*, based on the hadith of Qays bin Sa’d bin ‘Ubadah, who said, “The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, used to order us to give it [*zakat al-fitr*] before the obligation of *zakat* was revealed. When the verse of *zakat* was revealed, we were neither commanded to, nor forbidden from, giving it [*zakat al-fitr*], but we continue doing so.”⁵

When does *zakat al-fitr* become obligatory?

Abu Hanifa and Malik via Ibn al-Qasim: At dawn on the day of Eid al-Fitr.

Shafi’i and Malik via Ashhab: At sunset on the last day of Ramadan.

Thus, for a newborn baby between these two times, there is disagreement as to whether or not *zakat al-fitr* is due on his/her behalf.

Recipients

Poor Muslims may receive it, by consensus (*ijma’*).

As for poor *dhimmis* [protected non-Muslims], most of the jurists say that they may not receive it. Imam Abu Hanifa said that they may receive it. Some said that only monks amongst *dhimmis* may receive it.

⁴ Extracted from: Ibn Rushd al-Qurtubi al-Andalusi [Averroes], *Bidayat al-Mujtahid* [The Distinguished Jurist’s Primer], Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1418/1997, vol. 1, pp. 413-420

⁵ Nasa’i, Ibn Majah, Hakim & Bayhaqi

2. EXTRACT FROM *FATH AL-BARI*, IBN HAJAR AL-‘ASQALANI’S COMMENTARY ON *SAHIH AL-BUKHARI*, CHAPTERS ON SADAQAH AL-FITR, HADITHS NOS. 1503-1512 (translations of these hadiths widely available)

<http://hadith.al-islam.com/Page.aspx?pageid=192&TOCID=965&BookID=33&PID=2783>

Ja’far al-Firyabi narrated in his *Kitab Sadaqat al-Fitr (Book of Fast-Breaking Almsgiving)* that when Ibn ‘Abbas was the governor of Basra, he ordered the giving of *zakat al-fitr*: a *sa’* of dates etc. or half a *sa’* of wheat. When ‘Ali came and saw the cheap prices, he commanded that a *sa’* measure be used for all foodstuffs, indicating that he considered the value of the food, whilst Abu Sa’id considered the volume of the food.

ويدل على أنهم لاحظوا ذلك ما روى جعفر الفريابي في " كتاب صدقة الفطر " أن ابن عباس لما كان أمير البصرة أمرهم بإخراج زكاة الفطر وبين لهم أنها صاع من تمر ، إلى أن قال : أو نصف صاع من بر . قال : فلما جاء علي ورأى رخص أسعارهم قال : اجعلوها صاعا من كل ، فدل على أنه كان ينظر إلى القيمة في ذلك ، ونظر أبو سعيد إلى الكيل كما سيأتي .

3. ABOUT UK FOOD BANKS

In the UK, the Trussell Trust (<http://www.trusselltrust.org/>) runs a network of foodbanks, although there are many other independent foodbanks and collection points run by churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, community centres, etc. Trussell can help community and faith organisations to begin a foodbank, and also have a partnership with Tesco, such that every Tesco store is potentially a foodbank collection point. Many foodbanks distribute food parcels to the needy on one day each week.

Trussell’s recommended items for foodbanks, based on <http://www.trusselltrust.org/resources/documents/foodbank/website-shopping-list.pdf> and variations in printed leaflets from Trussell:

- Milk (long-life/UHT or powdered)
- Sugar
- Fruit Juice (long-life or carton)
- Soup / Hot Chocolate
- Pasta Sauces
- Sponge Pudding (tinned)
- Cereals
- Rice pudding / Custard
- Tea Bags / Instant Coffee
- Instant Mashed Potato
- Rice / Pasta
- Tinned Meat / Fish
- Tinned Fruit, incl. tomatoes
- Jam
- Biscuits or Snack Bars

4. APPROXIMATE WEIGHT (MASS) OF ONE SA' (THREE LITRES) OF VARIOUS FOODSTUFFS, THE RECOMMENDED AMOUNT OF ZAKAT AL-FITR TO BE GIVEN PER PERSON

This is based on simple measuring out and weighing using a measuring container and scales found in an average kitchen, by the author on the date of the fatwa. (This is a fun, instructive and educational activity for adults and children towards a religious, humanitarian objective.)

- Rice 2.4kg
- Flour (medium chapatti) 1.8kg
- Dates (sticky Saudi ones) 2.1kg
- Pasta (white fusilli) 1.0kg
- Porridge / porage oats (Scott's) 1.1kg
- Corn Flakes (Kellogg's) 480g
- Crunchy Nut Corn Flakes (Kellogg's) 600g
- Cheerios (Nestle) 360g

5. EXAMPLE OF DIY ZAKAT AL-FITR IN ACTION IN THE UK

On this date, the author and his wife are blessed with four children, so the following foodstuffs, all in 500g packets, were bought from a local supermarket and delivered to a local foodbank collection point, by the grace of God:

Rice 5kg

Pasta 3kg

Porridge oats 2.5kg

Total cost: £20, working out at just under £3.50 per head for a family of six

May Allah (God) accept and bless our Ramadan and Eid!