

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:
Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid

178167 - He fasted as expiation for breaking an oath, but is not sure whether his fasting is valid, because he could afford to feed poor people

the question

I broke an oath, so I wanted to offer expiation for that, but I am not sure whether I am one of those who could feed or clothe ten poor persons or not, as I find this somewhat difficult, but I am able to do it in general terms. What is the Islamic view regarding that? The money with which I would feed or clothe ten persons would basically come from my family, because I am still dependent on them, and they spend on my maintenance. Is it the expiation I offered valid in this case? I fasted for three days as expiation for breaking that oath, but I still feel uncertain as to whether it will be accepted, hence I am asking this question and I hope that you can clarify.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The options for expiation for breaking an oath are in accordance with the order in which Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, mentions them in Soorat al-Maa'idah, where He says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Allah will not impose blame upon you for what is meaningless in your oaths, but He will impose blame upon you for [breaking] what you intended of oaths. So its expiation is the feeding of ten needy people from the average of that which you feed your [own] families or clothing them or the freeing of a slave. But whoever cannot find [or afford it] - then a fast of three days [is required]. That is the expiation for oaths when you have sworn. But guard your oaths. Thus does Allah make clear to you His verses that you may be grateful} [al-Maa'idah 5:89].

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:
Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid

The one who is offering this expiation must choose one of these three options and do it:

Feeding ten poor persons from the average of that which he feeds his [own] family, or clothing them, or freeing a slave.

The one who does one of these things has discharged his duty and has done what is required of him. If he is unable to do any of these three options, he moves to the option of fasting, and he must fast three days.

The amount of food that must be given is half of one saa' to each poor person, which is equivalent to approximately one and a half kilograms of rice and the like. If some kind of sauce is provided with it, that is better. It is sufficient to provide lunch or dinner to ten poor people.

In terms of clothing, it is sufficient to give a chemise (thobe) to each poor person.

See the answer to question no. [45676](#) .

It is not permissible to move to the option of fasting when one is able to feed or clothe poor people or free a slave, because Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning) {But whoever cannot find [or afford it] - then a fast of three days [is required]} [al-Maa'idah 5:89].

Ibn al-Mundhir (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The scholars are unanimously agreed that if the one who made an oath can afford to feed or clothe poor persons, or free a slave, it is not valid for him to fast if he breaks his oath." (*Al-Ijmaa'* p. 157).

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked about a man who swore to do something, then he broke his oath, and he fasted even though he could afford to feed poor people; what is the ruling on that? Is it valid for him to fast even though Allah mentioned feeding poor people as the first option, and said that fasting is only valid if one cannot feed people. If he was not aware of that ruling, is the ruling different?

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:
Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid

He replied: If someone fasted in expiation for breaking an oath when he could afford to feed or clothe ten poor persons or free a slave, then his fast is to be regarded as supererogatory (naafil) and he must still offer the expiation. But his fasting is not wasted, as it will be counted as a supererogatory deed, but he should feed poor people.

Many people think that the expiation for breaking an oath is fasting, but if a person swears an oath, adjuring his brother, and says: By Allah, you must do such and such, and he says: Do not make me fast for three days, this is wrong. Feeding or clothing ten poor persons, or freeing a slave, takes precedence, but if a person cannot afford to do that, then he should fast three consecutive days." (*Al-Liqa' ash-Shahri* no. 70; question no. 10).

The guideline on whether it is permissible to move to the option of fasting is if a person cannot afford to offer expiation from that which is surplus to his basic needs and those of his family for one day and one night of food, shelter, means of transportation and a servant whom he needs.

Ibn Qudaamah (may Allah have mercy on him) said in *al-Mughni* (10/18-20): The one who does not have food surplus to what he and his dependents need for one day and one night in the amount required to be offered as expiation may offer expiation by fasting....

Expiation is only obligatory from that which is surplus to his basic needs, and having shelter is a basic need, as is the mount that he needs to ride, and as is the servant whom he needs to serve him. End quote.

Based on that, you should look at the time when you fasted as expiation: did you have enough to feed ten poor persons that was surplus to what you needed to feed yourself and meet your basic needs, whether it was something that you earned through your work or that you took from your family?

If you had enough, then you could afford it, and the fasting that you did is not valid [as expiation].

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:
Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid

If you did not have enough, then your fasting is valid.

If you are not sure about that, then you should offer expiation again, so that you may be certain that you have discharged your obligation.

If it becomes apparent that you could have afforded it at that time, and that your fasting is not valid [as expiation], but now you are no longer able to afford it, then you should fast for three days, because you are unable to feed or clothe poor persons or free a slave.

And Allah knows best.