

182467 - Is it permissible to sell food coupons (food stamps) when it is illegal to do that?

the question

I would like to ask you about food coupons (food stamps). Many Muslims receive food stamps in the USA, hence my question is: is it permissible to sell these stamps (coupons) and turn them into cash? Even though it is known that the government of the USA does not allow that, and the government says that the stamps are only for food. What is the ruling on the one who does that?

Detailed answer

Firstly:

It is not permissible for the Muslim to cheat the system and do something illegal in order to get something that he is not entitled to, such as help in the form of cash or food, even if he is in need. Refraining from taking it is more appropriate and is better, especially if he is living in a non-Muslim country, because humiliation is more apparent there, and this is contrary to the dignity of the Muslim, as Islam encourages the Muslim to work and not be idle.

Secondly:

In the case where a person needs to receive food help in any country, there is nothing wrong – in principle – with the recipient selling the coupons for cash or other goods or food other than what is written on the coupon. That is because the way in which he obtained these coupons was not by purchasing them; rather they were a gift. However, if the coupons are something that he bought, then it is not permissible for the buyer of the coupons to sell them before he obtains the food itself with the coupons [which he may then sell]. But if the coupons were a gift, then it is not stipulated that he should obtain the food [and then sell it]. Similar to that is the case of selling some share of inheritance before acquiring it. Thus it is known that it is permissible for the initial owner of the coupons to sell them for whatever he likes, whether it is cash or something else, but it is not permissible for the one who acquires them from him to sell them before he

acquires food with the coupons [which he may then sell]. This is the more correct view, which is based on the fact that some of the Sahabah (may Allah be pleased with them) prohibited that. It is also the view of the Malikis and Shafa'is.

Muhammad ibn Rushd al-Qurtubi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: It was said to Malik: What do you think, is it permissible for these people who are going to receive some food to sell it before they acquire it? He said: I do not see anything wrong with that, because the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Whoever buys foodstuff should not sell it until he acquires it," but in this case they did not buy it; rather it is something that they are going to be given...

Muhammad ibn Rushd said:

Another proof is the hadith of Marwan ibn al-Hakam about the sukuk (financial certificates or bonds) that had become common during his time in Madinah – which people would sell to one another before acquiring what was written in the bond, so Zayd ibn Thabit and one of the companions of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) went to visit Marwan and said: Do you permit selling with riba, O Marwan? And he said: I seek refuge with Allah! What do you mean? They said: These sukuk (bonds) that people are selling to one another, and they sell them before acquiring what is written on them. So Marwan sent the guards to track them down then take them away from people and return them to their original owners (narrated by Muslim). These sukuk (bonds) these were promissory notes in which it was written that some wealth from the treasury would be given to some of the people of Madinah, then the people sold these promissory notes, and selling them was permissible in the first instance, but if the one who bought it then sold it before acquiring what was written on it, the sale of it by the second one was haram. So Marwan issued orders that the second transaction be cancelled, and the bonds be returned to the first purchaser, and he did not cancel the sale of these notes by the initial recipients."(*Al-Bayan wa't-Tahsil* 7/355-357).

See the words of an-Nawawi – and more details about this issue – in the answer to question no. [98713](#) .

Thirdly:

From the above it becomes clear that there is nothing wrong – in principle – with selling food coupons (or food stamps) because they are not cash, and they were not obtained by purchasing them. So the most correct view is that it is permissible to sell them. But we say that it is not permissible to sell them for a different reason, which is that according to the regulations of the government that issues these food stamps, it is not allowed to sell them, and they are given to poor people so that they can obtain food with them. So using them for any purpose other than that for which they were issued is not allowed according to the system, based on the fact that they are a gift to which conditions are attached. Therefore it is a must to adhere to the system and the conditions stipulated by the giver, and they should not be disposed of by selling them.

But the one who obtains these food stamps may dispose of them by consuming the food, or selling them, or giving them to whomever he wants, so long as he obtained them in accordance with the conditions stipulated by the giver.

And Allah knows best.