

5893 - Sponsoring a lost child

the question

Is it possible to sponsor a child whose father is missing under a program for sponsoring orphans, or should this sponsorship program be only for orphans?

Detailed answer

The orphan is a child whose father has died, as was stated by the scholars in *Lisaan al-'Arab* [an Arabic-language dictionary] and elsewhere. Such a child is regarded as an orphan until he reaches the age of puberty, i.e., the age of fifteen or earlier if the signs of puberty appear. These signs are: the emission of gushing water (ejaculation) during intercourse or a wet-dream, the growth of coarse hair around the private parts, and, in the case of females, the onset of menstruation.

(See *Al-Mughni* by Ibn Qudaamah, 6/591)

As for the child whose father is missing, he is not considered to be an orphan unless it is proven that his father is dead, or a period of time passes beyond which it is impossible that his father would still be alive; this should be left to the discretion of the judge, as stated by the majority of the *fuqaha'* on the topic of the inheritance of one who is missing.

If this child is poor or comes from a poor family, then money can be spent on him from the *Zakaah* or general charity funds, but orphan sponsorship does not apply in his case.