89746 - Ruling on educational contests in newspapers

the question

A few days ago I bought a religious newspaper and I found that it was running a contest. I found that I was able to answer the questions, so I sent in my answers.
Is it permissible for me to accept the prize if I win?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The Muslims are unanimously agreed that gambling is haram according to sharee’ah, and that it is consuming people’s wealth unlawfully.

Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“O you who believe! Intoxicants (all kinds of alcoholic drinks), and gambling, and Al-Ansaab (stone altars for sacrifices to false gods, idols etc), and Al-Azlaam (arrows for seeking luck or decision) are an abomination of Shaytaan’s (Satan’s) handiwork. So avoid (strictly all) that (abomination) in order that you may be successful.

91. Shaytaan (Satan) wants only to excite enmity and hatred between you with intoxicants (alcoholic drinks) and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of Allah and from As-Salaah (the prayer). So, will you not then abstain?” [al-Maa'idah 5:90-91]

The scholars counted gambling as one of the major sins.

See: I’laam al-Muwaqqi’een (4/309) and al-Zawaajir (2/328)

Concerning the reason for the revelation of the verse quoted above, it was narrated that Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allah be pleased with him) said: During the Jaahiliyyah, a man would bet his family and wealth against another man, and whichever of them won, he would take the wealth and family of the other. So this verse was revealed. Narrated by al-Tabari in Jaami’ al-Bayaan (2/369).

Hence the scholars laid down the important principle which refers to what is meant by gambling. They said: It is a situation where anyone who participates in it will either win or lose i.e., he pays a sum of money, which is his bet, and he will either lose it all or win the amount stated in the contest, as in the case of lotteries.

Based on this, it is only gambling if the person who enters the contest pays some amount of money which he risks losing. This money may be called by several names, none of which change the ruling on gambling in the slightest. They may call it an entry fee or the price of buying a ticket to enter the contest and so on. It is all gambling.

But if the contestant does not pay anything to enter the contest, then this is not regarded as gambling and there is nothing wrong with entering.

Secondly:

There remains the issue of educational contests that are published in newspapers and magazines – is it permissible to take part in them and accept prizes or not?

Some scholars are of the view that it is haram to take part in these contests.

Shaykh Ibn Jibreen (may Allah preserve him) was asked the following question (Fataawa fi’l-Buyoo’, question no. 43):

What is the ruling on contests held by newspapers and magazines?

He replied:

Undoubtedly these contests that are held by newspapers and magazines only serve their own interests, such as increasing their sales and circulation, thus making much more money from sales

than they give in prizes, even though there is nothing to distinguish this paper from others, and it may in fact contain corrupt and evil material, indecent pictures and reprehensible articles. They seek to increase their circulation by means of these prizes. Based on this, it is not permissible to take part in these contests, because that is encouraging them and strengthening their newspapers. And Allah knows best. End quote.

In the answer to question no. 20993 we have quoted the fatwa of Shaykh Ibn Baaz (may Allah have mercy on him) stating that these contests are haram.

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) was of the view that these contests are permissible subject to two conditions:

1 –That the contestant buys the product or newspaper because he needs it. If he is only buying it because of the contest then it is not permissible, because in that case it is a kind of gambling, as the contestant is risking the money that he pays (the price of the newspaper) in return for the possibility of winning the contest.

Based on that, if he buys the newspaper not in order to read it but only to cut out the coupon for the contest, or he buys more than one copy of the newspaper, then his entering the contest is haram and is a kind of gambling.

2 – The price of the product or newspaper should not be raised for the sake of the contest. If the newspaper cost 3 riyals then it is raised to 4 riyals because of the contest, then entering it is haram, because this extra amount is because of the contest, so it is also a kind of gambling.

See: As'ilat al-Baab il-Maftooh by Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen (1162).

Based on this, your taking part in the contest is permissible, because you did not buy the newspaper for the sake of the contest, so long as the price of the newspaper was not raised because of the contest.

And Allah knows best.