6476 - Are Lotteries Haram?

the question

Does buying lottery tickets fall into the category of gambling which is haram? What response would you give to people who claim to be only occasional gamblers?

Summary of answer

Lottery is another name for gambling which is haram according to the Quran and Sunnah, and the consensus of the scholars.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Are lotteries haram?

Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Baz (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked:

“Are the lotteries or raffles which some charities organize to raise funds for their activities in the educational, medical or social work fields, permissible according to Shari`ah?”

He answered:

“Lotteries and raffles are other names for gambling , which is haram according to the Quran and Sunnah, and the consensus of the scholars. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

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

Shaytan (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 Salah (the prayer). So, will you not then abstain?" [al-Maidah 5:90-91]

It is not permissible for the Muslims to engage in any kind of gambling at all, whether the money collected from gambling is to spend on charitable projects or otherwise, because it is evil and forbidden, as indicated by the general meaning of the evidence, and because the earnings derived from gambling are among the kinds of earnings which we must avoid and beware of. And Allah is the Source of strength." (Fatawa Islamiyyah, 4/442)

Can you take part in lotteries?

Shaykh Muhammad al-Salih al-'Uthaymin was asked:

What is the ruling on taking part in lotteries , which means that a person buys a ticket and if he is lucky he gets a lot of money, knowing that this person intends to use that money for Islamic projects and to help the mujahidin so that they will benefit from that?

He answered:

"What the questioner describes, where a person buys a ticket then if he is lucky – as he says – he gets a lot of money, comes under the heading of gambling , of which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"O you who believe! Intoxicants (all kinds of alcoholic drinks), and gambling, and Al Ansab (stone altars for sacrifices to idols, etc.), and Al Azlam (arrows for seeking luck or decision) are an abomination of Shaytan's (Satan's) handiwork. So avoid (strictly all) that (abomination) in order that you may be successful.

Shaytan (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 the prayer. So, will you not then abstain?

And obey Allah and the Messenger (Muhammad), and beware (of even coming near to drinking or gambling or Al Ansab, or Al Azlam) and fear Allah. Then if you turn away, you should know that it is Our Messenger's duty to convey (the Message) in the clearest way" [al-Maidah 5:90-91]

This gambling – which is any transaction in which a person may win or lose, and he does not know whether he will be a winner or a loser – is all haram. Indeed, it is one of the major sins, and its abhorrent nature is no secret when one realizes that Allah mentions it in conjunction with idol-worship, alcohol and azlam (arrows for seeking luck or decision). Whatever benefits may be hoped for from gambling pale into insignificance beside the harm that it causes. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"They ask you (O Muhammad) concerning alcoholic drink and gambling. Say: 'In them is a great sin, and (some) benefits for men, but the sin of them is greater than their benefit.'" [al-Baqarah 2:219]

Think about this verse, where benefits are mentioned in the plural, and sin is mentioned in the singular. Allah did not say, "In it are many sins and (some) benefits for men", rather He said (interpretation of the meaning): "a great sin". This is an indication that the benefits, no matter how numerous they may be, are insignificant when compared with this great sin; the great sin far outweighs them. So its sin is greater than its benefits, no matter what they are. (Fatawa Islamiyyah, 4/441)

Can you gamble occasionally?

With regard to a person's saying that he only gambles occasionally, this is like one who says that he only commits adultery occasionally, or he only steals occasionally, or he only lies occasionally. Does the fact that he commits that haram action only rarely mean that it is not a sin and that he is not exposed to the wrath of Allah? How does he know that this rare action will not develop into something that is done more frequently, until it becomes a habit? In fact this is what usually happens, especially in the case of those who are afflicted by gambling. He should fear Allah and abstain from that which Allah has forbidden to him.

And Allah knows best.