70274 - Is it permissible to avoid paying electricity bills because the state is charging them too much?

the question

Is it permissible for a Muslim state in the modern age to charge its citizens too much in electricity bills and water bills in order to make them use less energy?

Doesn't lighting the public roadways and streets go against the hadeeth of the Prophet , "Extinguish your lamps"?

There is a hadeeth from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) which says, "The Muslim should not deprive his Muslim brother of three things: water, pasture and fire."

So is it not permissible for us to use tricks to avoid paying these excessive bills? If that is not permissible, then how can we change our way of life when a man's family, relatives and neighbours do not help him in that regard?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Governments and officials should be kind towards their citizens and not impose unbearable burdens on them. It is not permissible for the state to monopolize basic essential goods and services which people cannot do without, then sell them to them for inflated prices.

Governments should realize that they are not investment companies, whose main concern is making a profit from their citizens. Rather their main role is to serve their citizens, make things easier for them, and be kind towards them. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) prayed: "O Allaah, whoever is put in charge of any of the affairs of my ummah and treats them harshly, treat him harshly, and whoever is put in charge of any of the affairs of my ummah and treats them kindly, treat him kindly." Narrated by Muslim, 1828.

These officials should realize that tomorrow they will be standing before Allaah and accounting for their deeds, being rewarded or punished for them. Each ruler, official and minister will be asked about all of those who were under their authority: “Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock…”

May Allaah be pleased with ‘Umar, for he used to say: “If a mule stumbles in Iraq (which was on the edge of the Islamic state at that time), Allaah will ask me on the Day of Resurrection, ‘Why did you not maintain the road for it, O ‘Umar?’”

The questioning on the Day of Resurrection will be to such an extent, even about animals – so how about the thousands and millions of people who are subjected to oppression and wrongful treatment?

Nations become strong when justice prevails, and nations decline because of injustice.

Hence it was said that Allaah supports just nations even if they are kaafirs, and He does not support unjust nations even if they are Muslims. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “No sin brings a swifter punishment than injustice and severing the ties of kinship.” The unjust person will be punished in this world even if he is forgiven and granted mercy in the Hereafter. That is because justice is the foundation of all things. If a thing is based on justice it will endure, even if its founder has no share in the Hereafter. If it is not based on justice then it will not endure, even if its founder has faith for which he will be rewarded in the Hereafter.

Majmoo’ al-Fataawa by Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah, 28/146

Secondly:

The Muslim has to be patient and seek reward with Allaah, and not respond to cheating and injustice in kind.

It is not permissible to tinker with the electricity meter, or to use tricks to avoid paying the bills, because that is cheating, deceiving and consuming people’s wealth unlawfully.

The Standing Committee was asked: Is it permissible to stop electricity or water meters in a kaafir state so as to weaken that state? Please note that the state takes unjust taxes from me which I pay unwillingly.

They replied:

That is not permissible, because it is consuming people’s wealth unlawfully. End quote.

Fataawa al-Lajnah al-Daa’imah, 23/441

The Standing Committee was also asked: is it permissible to use tricks to avoid paying bills for electricity, water, television, gas and so on? Please note that most of these things are provided by publicly owned companies.

They replied:

That is not permissible, because it is consuming people’s wealth unlawfully and is a failure to fulfil trusts. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Verily, Allaah commands that you should render back the trusts to those, to whom they are due”

[al-Nisa’ 4:29]

“O you who believe! Eat not up your property among yourselves unjustly except it be a trade amongst you, by mutual consent. And do not kill yourselves (nor kill one another). Surely, Allaah is Most Merciful to you”

[al-Nisa’ 4:58]

end quote.

Fataawa al-Lajnah al-Daa’imah, 23/441

Thirdly:

You quote as evidence the hadeeth, “Three things cannot be denied anyone: water, pasture and fire” (narrated by Ibn Maajah, 2473) – and according to another report: “The Muslims are partners in three things: water, pasture and fire, and their price is haraam” (narrated by Ibn Maajah, 2472 – both hadeeths were classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Ibn Maajah). But quoting these reports as evidence is not correct. If these things are collected and taken possession of, then it is permissible to sell them, as water may be sold in bottles, for example. Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: He said that it is not permissible to sell spring water, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The Muslims are partners in three things: water, pasture and fire,” and because this water was not extracted by any human effort, rather it came out by the power of Allaah. A man may dig a deep well and find that no water comes out, so this water is not the result of his efforts or actions, rather he is only a cause. So he cannot take possession of it, and if he cannot take possession of it then he cannot sell it. But if he took possession of it, took the water away and put it in a tank, then it is permissible for him to sell it, because it became his property by means of removing it and putting it in his tank. End quote from al-Sharh al-Mumti’, 8/154

The same applies to using the command to extinguish lamps as evidence. The apparent meaning is to limit the use of lamps that could be a cause of the house burning down. The hadeeth referred to was narrated by Abu Dawood (5247) from Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allaah be pleased with him) who said: A mouse came and started dragging the wick, which it brought and dropped in front of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), on the mat on which he was sitting, and a spot the size of a dirham was burned. He said: “When you go to sleep, extinguish your lamps, for the Shaytaan shows this (the wick) to this one (the mouse) and it will burn you.” Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Abi Dawood.

Muslim (2012) narrated from Jaabir (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Extinguish lamps… for the evil one (the mouse) will burn people’s houses around them.”

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) ordered that lamps be extinguished

before sleeping if there is the fear that leaving them may be the cause of a fire in the house. Hence the scholars such as Ibn Daqeeq al-'Eid, al-Nawawi and al-Haafiz ibn Hajar stated that if a person makes sure, before going to sleep, that the lamp will not fall, there is nothing wrong in that case with going to sleep and leaving the lamps lit.

See Fath al-Baari, 11/89

It may be said that lighting the streets at night is a means of reducing crimes and evil; this is something that is well known.

Fourthly:

Everyone should be economical in using electricity and water, and to be content with just what he needs, without being extravagant, because of the general meaning of the evidence that forbids extravagance and waste, without paying any attention to what relatives and neighbours say. It may be noted that many people keep the lights on in all the rooms of the house when there is no need for that, or they use air-conditioners and heaters in an extravagant manner.

We ask Allaah to help and guide us and you.

And Allaah knows best.