The blessed month of Ramadan has just left us. Alhamdulillah, we concluded the obligatory fasting prescribed in it. Ramadan uplifted our spirits through tarawih, tahajjud and other nawafil prayers. It taught us to be patient, forgiving, and charitable. It gave us an opportunity to recite Allah (SWT)’s Book and develop a close personal relationship with Him. We begged Him to forgive our sins, fulfill our needs, and respond to our calls. Addressing the Prophet (SAW), Allah (SWT) says, “If My servants ask you about Me, I am near. I respond to those who call Me, so let them respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be guided” (al-Baqarah, 2:186). This is what we hoped for throughout the month of Ramadan.

Now that Ramadan is over, we are challenged to respond to the call of Allah (SWT) and prove to Him that we are His true humble servants (’ibad) so that we are counted among those who will be freed from the hell-fire. It is now time to reflect whether our fasting, our prayers, our charities, and our other good deeds done during Ramadan were solely for the sake of Allah (SWT) and in order to gain physical and spiritual strength to struggle in His path or were they for any other motive, such as to show off. Did we fast to do Allah (SWT) a favor or was it the sign of obedience of humble slaves to a great master? It is Allah’s favor on us that He made us Muslims and guided us to a path that leads to happiness in this world and salvation in the next. This phenomenon is explained in Surat al-Hujurat. “They think they have done you a favor by becoming Muslims! Say: Do not consider your submission a favor to me; it is God who has done you a favor by guiding you to faith, if you are truly sincere” (al-Hujurat, 49:17).

If one is sincere, one has no problem in responding to the call of Allah (SWT). The ayah (186) of Surat al-Baqarah, which addresses the topic of responding to this call, contains three important subjects: (1) du’a; (2) responding to Allah (SWT), and (3) believing in Allah (SWT).

The power of du’a should never be underestimated. According to a hadith, “Du’a is ‘Ibadah (worship).” It is learnt that the Prophet (SAW) followed this hadith with the Qur’anic ayah, “Your Lord says, ‘Call on Me and I will answer you; those who are too proud to worship (call on) Me will enter Hell humiliated’” (Ghafir, 40:60). Another hadith tells us, “Du’a is the core or essence of worship.” We need to continue to be connected to our Creator. Du’a is the best way to do so. It is not He who needs us. It is we who need Him. Du’a are of three types: (1) du’a al-hajah or invoking Allah (SWT) for fulfillment of any need, (2) du’a al-duniawi or making du’a for the needs of this world, and to be protected therein, (3) du’a li al-akhirah or making du’a for forgiveness of one’s sins and for entering paradise. The Prophet (SAW)’s most beloved du’a for success in both worlds is the one mentioned in Surat al-Baqarah, “Our Lord, give us good in this world, and good in the Next World, and safeguard us from the punishment of the Fire” (al-Baqarah, 2:201).

Responding to Allah (SWT) implies becoming His humble slave through complete submission and total obedience to Him. There are two pre-requisites to be counted as a true humble slave of Allah (SWT): total sincerity and total submission to Allah (SWT). There is a distinction between ‘ibadah (worship and obedience) and
‘ibadat (various modes of worship) as clarified in the ayah, “They were only ordered to worship (and obey) Allah, sincerely devoting their religion to Him as people of true faith, and to establish prayers (salat), and pay obligatory charity (zakat) — for that is truly the right way” (al-Baiyinah, 98:5). It is not right to think that by fulfilling the ‘ibadat such as salah, zakah, sawm, hajj etc, one has completed one’s faith; this is only partial completion of faith. The other part is to submit totally to Allah’s commands and to worship Him alone, without associating anyone or anything with Him; not even oneself or one’s desires (hawa). “Worship God; join nothing with Him” (al-Nisa’, 4:36). This worship and obedience is to be continued until one’s last breath. This is made clear in the ayah, “Worship your Lord until what is certain comes to you” (al-Hijr, 15:99).

Ayah 186 of Surat al-Baqarah that refers to responding to Allah’s call comes in the middle of the Ayat al-Siyam (183-187). The mode of worship of fasting or Siyam is discussed in detail only in these ayat of the Qur’an. The month of Ramadan, among other things, is the month of du’a. When we ask Allah (SWT) to respond to our call, He replies that He responds to those who call Him and who respond to Him and believe in Him. How can one respond to Allah’s call? Since Allah (SWT) is beyond the need of any help, we can only respond by helping His cause. To know what Allah (SWT) wants of us, we have to go back to His Book—the Qur’an. According to Abdullah ibn Mas’ud (RA), we should very attentively listen to and ponder over the ayat that begin with the words “O people!” or “O you who believe!” for we should know that Allah (SWT) is addressing us, and that He wants something from us. It is incumbent upon us to read and understand the Qur’an, live by it, embody it, and disseminate its teachings to others.

Unfortunately, many Muslims who had made recitation of the Qur’an an integral part of their daily schedule during the blessed days of Ramadan discontinue doing so after Ramadan. The Qur’an is shelved. This should not be done. The Qur’an is our guidance and the primary medium of our connection with the Divine.

A synopsis of what Allah (SWT) wants from us is outlined in the last two ayahs of Surat al-Hajj that contain five imperatives or commands. “O you who believe, bow down, prostrate yourselves, worship your Lord, and do good so that you may succeed. Strive hard for God as is His due” (al-Hajj, 22:77-78). The first two—bowing down and prostration can be lumped together into one item—‘ibadat, which by extension also include all other modes of worship such as obligatory and supererogatory prayers, fasting, giving charity, performing hajj and umra and so on. The first thing Allah (SWT) needs from us for our own salvation is to keep these modes of worship intact. We have then to obey every single command of Allah (SWT), be it something easy such as greeting someone, or something difficult which includes staying away from all that is unlawful (haram) or undesirable. The Prophet (SAW)’s example is the best model for us. Further, we are also required to do good and serve humanity. This is made clear in many ayat in the Qur’an. One such ayah is, “You are the best community evolved for mankind; you order what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in God” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:110).

While we should continue to do various types of charitable work, the climax of them all is to invite people to the path of Allah (SWT). This is our duty as it is we who have the truth. This is what Allah wants us to do. Finally, we have to do jihad, which means to struggle in the path of Allah (SWT). Unfortunately, the term jihad has become a misnomer. It is usually misunderstood as and restricted to mean qital or fighting, even by some Muslims. The real jihad is to struggle against one’s own nafs or self. The Prophet (SAW), at the time he returned from the Battle of Tabuk is reported to have told his companions that they had returned from al-Jihad al-Asghar (the lesser jihad) to strive in al-Jihad al-Akbar (the greater jihad). When asked to explain the greater jihad, he replied that it was the jihad of someone against his desires. On one occasion, the Prophet (SAW) was asked: “Which of the three persons carries on jihad; one who fights for bravery and courage, one who fights tribalism or nationalism, or one who fights to be seen or to show off?” The Prophet (SAW) replied: “The one who fights to uphold the message of Allah is the person who carries on jihad in the cause of Allah.”

In contemporary times, the Muslim world does not have a caliph (khalifa) who would represent all the Muslims of the world and who would be authorized, if circumstances so dictated, to declare jihad against anyone. The mightiest jihad that can be done in present times is with the Qur’an. This is what Allah (SWT) wants us
to do. “So do not give in to the disbelievers: strive hard against them with this Quran” (al-Furqan, 25:52). We have to read, understand, and embody the Qur’an and struggle with it against all types of oppression, exploitation, and injustice. Unless we respond to this call of the Qur’an, our entreaties made to Allah (SWT) may not be responded by Him.

Responding to Allah’s call also entails believing in Him as He ought to be believed. This requires having implicit faith in Him, placing our unshakable trust in Him, and being conscious of Him all the time. Allah (SWT) makes matters easy for those who have taqwa of Him. “God makes things easy for those who are mindful of Him”(At-Talaq, 65:4). He finds out a way for them and provides for them from sources, which they cannot even imagine. “God will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him, and will provide for them from an unexpected source” (At-Talaq, 65:2-3).

Anyone who makes a conscious decision to submit to Allah (SWT) is put through various tests. This is how it works if one’s real faith in Allah (SWT) is to be tested. “Do people think they will be left alone after saying ‘We believe’ without being put to the test? We tested those who went before them: God will certainly mark out which ones are truthful and which are lying” (al-‘Ankabut, 29:2-3). It is important to take time out and assess ourselves. The month of Ramadan helped us charge our batteries. Let us resolve to keep it charged even beyond Ramadan lest it gets extinguished. We never know whether Allah (SWT) will make us reach another Ramadan.

Edited by Dr. Munawar Haque
IONA Research & Publications