

## How to Ask of Allah

AND IF MY servants ask thee about me—behold, I am near; I respond to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls unto Me: let them, then, respond unto Me, and believe in Me, so that they might follow the right way. [Sûrat Al-Baqarah, 2:186]

### **Our Islam: Finding Our Personal Submission**

Ramadan is a time for cultivating a heightened awareness of Allah—and subsequently of reaping a willingness and eagerness on our part for bending and conforming ourselves to the Sunnah of Allah, our Creator, the One who formed us and shaped us to be as we are. Our Community's seasonal fasting (*ḥajm*), with its fulfillment of our collective food and drink needs at Maghrib (Sunset), the time of collective fast-breaking (*ifṭâr*), is followed by evenings of social solidarity in *tarâwî*^ Prayers focused upon our praise of Allah and our supplication to Him, an overall effort preparing us for something deeper still....

Daytime introspection and meditation, arising out of a fresh re-reading of our Book of Guidance, prepare the conscience and self-evaluative functions, and prime our expectation of personal revival and transformation. With the Doors of Heaven opened, its Help offered to us—and the forces of evil held at bay—during this blessed month, we are called upon—in fact, clearly required—to fast:

It was the month of Ramadan...Hence, whoever of you lives to see this month shall fast throughout it;... [He desires] that you complete the number [of days required], and that you extol Allah for His having guided you aright, and that you render your thanks [unto Him]. [Sûrat Al-Baqarah, 2:185]

No excuses—other than the reasonable estimation of risk of harm, extreme hardship, or incapacity—can delay this practice. This is a time of stepped-up opportunity for personal development through accessing and embracing the proffered Help of Allah, with the ultimate goal of our submission (*islâm*) to His Guidance, and thus the utmost of success from our lives.

When Comes the Help of Allah... [Sûrat Al-Nasr, 110:1]

But how are we fully to access the needed Help of Allah?

\* \* \* \* \*

**First**, of course, we must be aware that it is on offer and know from where to obtain it—and under what terms:

...But your Sustainer says: "Call unto Me, [and] I shall respond to you! Verily, they who are too proud to worship Me will enter Hell, abased!" ... He is the Ever-Living; there is no deity save Him: call, then, unto Him [alone], sincere in your faith in Him. All praise is due to Allah, the Sustainer of all the worlds! Say: "... I am bidden to surrender myself to the Sustainer of all the worlds." [Sûrat Ghâfir, 40:59-60, 65-66]

Call unto your Sustainer humbly, and in the secrecy of your hearts. Verily, He loves not those who transgress the bounds of what is right: Hence, do not spread corruption on earth after it has been so well ordered. And call unto Him with fear and longing: Verily, Allah's grace is ever near unto the doers of good! [Sûrat Al-Aḫrâf, 7:55-56]

**Second**, this Help must be consciously and deliberately verbalized and asked for from Allah, our hands outstretched in expectation, ready to receive what He is already posed to hand to us at our earliest time of readiness. (This action must be more than consciously wishing for something that we know Allah alone can bring to us, even if we know not from where.)

Say: "My Sustainer has [but] enjoined the doing of what is right; and [He desires you to] put your whole being into every act of worship, and to call unto Him, sincere in your faith in Him alone. As it was He who brought you into being in the first instance, so also [unto Him] you will return... [Sûrat Al-Açrâf, 7:29]

It is we who must ready ourselves for His gifts—yes, but not without His Help even in our asking from Him! It may be us, we alone, who stand in the way of receiving His blessings.

If we don't even ask from Him, our Lord, if we don't even recognize His praiseworthiness and put ourselves in that groove of constant praise, we deprive ourselves of closeness to Allah—and possibly forestall or forfeit the answer to our supplications.

And Allah's [alone] are the attributes of perfection; invoke Him, then, by these, and stand aloof from all who distort the meaning of His attributes: They shall be requited for all that they were wont to do! [Sûrat Al-Açrâf, 7:180]

**Third**, the outstretched hands must not be withdrawn prematurely, if in our judgment we believe that receipt is not initiated immediately. Nor are we to give up, ready to conclude that Allah is either unable, or unwilling to provide for us, or, at worst, to assume that He is stingy and doesn't care about our felt needs!

Often the things we ask for from Allah—because we cannot obtain them otherwise—do not arrive on our doorstep, either by UPS delivery or on the wings of Jibrîl.

Speaking of Jibrîl, this angelic messenger of Allah has already delivered, for us all—in successive trips, measured and assembled—a complete Book of Guidance (meaning of course the Noble Quran). And this 7th-century delivery was made to a fellow human being, Prophet Muhammad—that is, to one thoroughly equipped to safely receive it, to guard and preserve it, to interpret its contents and to model it for our *Ummah* (the Muslim Community)—far better equipped than are any of us latter-day, would-be 'saints.'

So then, we'd best rule out the possibility of a dramatic public display of Allah's favor upon us and settle for a more drastic self-changing of our 'hearts'—the actual battlefield of submitting our wills to the guidance of our Mentor. The success of this change depends upon a determined self-effort—though, again, not without the Help of Allah to effect the process.

**Fourth**, know that learning lessons in persistence and patience might figure in. And seek aid in steadfast patience and prayer: And this, indeed, is a hard thing for all but the humble in spirit, who know with certainty that they shall meet their Sustainer and that unto Him they shall return. [Sûrat Al-Baqarah, 2:45-46]

If persistence in verbalizing one's request is not immediately productive of the imagined result, then one must persist in looking for the answer in something other than the envisioned form.

Perhaps, upon reflection, one might notice that one had asked for fame and fortune (for example), but that one received instead hard work in a steady (but non-glamorous) job, with its sufficient but modest pay and therewith the end of bills that one could not pay—as well as finding oneself in a self-esteem-producing position of trust and respect from colleagues.

Could that possibly be Allah’s answer to the needs for which the praying servant had prayed—in divine recognition of the praying servant’s true dire need?

### **New Furniture**

Perhaps there is a waiting period deemed necessary by Allah, the All-Knowing and Wise, *sub^ânahu wa taçâla*, during which time one prepares oneself to thankfully incorporate the to-be-received blessing into one’s lifestyle.

While waiting patiently for delivery of the new piece of “furniture” to one’s spiritual home, one might have to rearrange the existing pieces to make space, or she may even have to clear out that previously valued but frilly centerpiece of her daily living. Having the best “furniture” in our living space might preclude the keeping of what we once considered essential to our happiness.

Replacing the old “furniture” with new might require patience with yourself, as well as patience with Allah, especially after He has provided for you what you genuinely need—and, serendipitously, ultimately what you really want! It might take time to let go of the familiar and comfortable in order to feel “at home” with the best-ever, Allah-recommended, and Allah-gifted replacement.

### **Seeing Results**

All of us are “works in progress.” Learning to ask from Allah with the proper respect and trust is a life-long venture. The fasting state of Ramadan, while teaching us self-discipline and willing charity to those in more need than our own, also opens our eyes to our own neediness before Allah, the universal Provider, who alone can teach us our true needs.

Let us not miss the lessons opened for us in the hunger state of Ramadan fasting. And let us respond by asking from Allah the fulfillment of our most foundational and deep-reaching urges to understand ourselves and to do what is required of us by our Maker. It is to Him that we will account for our lifetime of moment-to-moment choices and for the self-making of ourselves in measurement against His Sunnah.

Let us not miss out on, or play down, the Help of Allah, as specially offered to us in the heightened awareness state intended for us all in this Holy month of Ramadan.

[But] do you think that you could enter paradise without having suffered like those [believers] who passed away before you? Misfortune and hardship befell them, and so shaken were they that the Messenger, and the believers with him, would exclaim, “When will Allah’s succor come?” Oh, verily, Allah’s succor is [always] near! [Sûrat Al-Baqarah, 2:214]

When Allah’s succor comes, extol thy Sustainer’s limitless glory, and praise Him, and seek His forgiveness: For, behold, He is ever an acceptor of repentance. [Sûrat Al-Na|r, 110:1-3]