

## بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

### Preparing for Ramadan in the Holy and Blessed Months of Rajab and Sha'ban Showing Gratitude and Calling Upon Allah

Allah Swt in the Holy Qur'an reveals:

**If any misfortune touches a man, he calls Us whether he is lying on his side or sitting or standing. But when We remove his misfortune, he continues in ways as if he had never called Us to remove the misfortune that touched him. In this way, We make pleasing to them the ways of that which they are doing.**

Also in Surah al-Hūd:

**As for the wretched, that Day they will be in the fire. For them they moan and sigh, dwelling within it so long as the heavens and earth abide, save for what your Lord wills. Surely your Lord does what He wants.**

In Surah al-Hadīd:

**All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Allah, the Almighty and the All-Wise. His is the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth. He gives life and He causes death, and He has Power over all things. He is the First, the Last, the Manifest, the Concealed, and the Knower of all things.**

*Alhamdulillah-Llāh*, we give praise to Allah Swt who brings us together on this day in this month of Rajab. We pray that those who don't have health to have health, so that they can enjoy these three months that are [here and are] coming, and to receive the blessings of Allah Swt to bring us together here. And may Allah grant us all health and capacity to

understand and have the freedom in the physical world to dive spiritually into these months. We should think about how we prepare ourselves for Shaban and Ramadan, here in the month of Rajab. To think about that, we have to think about the sovereignty of Allah as we read the *surahs*. The Qur'an tells us that we have to acknowledge that Allah Swt is the Creator of everything, and we shouldn't be forgetful of Him. Remember that if we practice hard over these next few months, we can perhaps receive a greater benefit from this time. We are blessed with the prosperity that we have, and some of us are even blessed with some affliction and adversity that we need to overcome. But we have to remember that Allah is the sovereign over all things.

What that means for us here and now is that we apply ourselves in the outer and in the inner with the same zeal; indeed, the outer in the way we spoke last night about doing business in the outer. It's very important I feel that we not take these months for granted, which are presented as opportunities to focus, more than anything, as a time pause while we are in the midst of our work. Of course, for us, it comes at a very, very busy time in our year. We have all the reasons and excuses to be tired, distracted, or focused on the good works we do, but we have to make them *ibāda*. As Allah Swt tells us in the Qur'an, few people show good *adab*. Few people show gratitude. We are really blessed when we have in front of us reminders of good behavior, so we have to engage ourselves with those models.

There was a time when Hazrat (ar) came during these months. We no longer have the physical model of our *shuyukh*, but we have the memory, and the model we have the model if we study Qur'an and bring near to us Rasūlu-Llāh (sal). Simply stated (perhaps over-simply stated, but not wasted breath), our eyes and ears and hearts have to be open during these months. *Inshā'a-Llāh*, we can learn something and receive the *baraka*, and even develop the *hikma* that flows to us at this time. Most often, we are forgetful. In our day to day life, we may even be ungrateful in success. Sometimes we have a feeling of hopelessness or helplessness in what we perceive to be our failures or shortcomings.

Sometimes, all it takes for us to do is one little thing we may not even like to do, but is good for us, and raises our spirits. Maybe sometimes one little thing makes it seem hopeless. Either extreme is not the best.

To have good character and good behavior takes effort; but we are really striving to have it be our default. Why we do these practices, and live in community, and gather together, and study, and serve is to raise the level of our default to be one of remembrance and gratitude, repentance and love. *Inshā'a-llāh*, for a few minutes, let's try to elaborate on this kind of behavior. Allah Swt says in Qur'an:

**Strange is man's behavior when he is in trouble. He calls Us, whether he is lying on his side or sitting or standing. But when We remove his misfortune, he continues in ways as if he had never called Us. Thus do the deeds of transgressors seem fair in their eyes.**

We are familiar with the fact that we call upon Allah when we are in need – that's nothing new to us. But we tend to forget, however, when that aid is given to us. Those of us who do that will find at that time that we are very weak in our *iman*, and we have very little sense of gratitude. Perhaps, we might even find ourselves selfish, dominated by our *nafs ammāra*, not willing to engage in the *nafs lawwama*. Unfortunately at times, some people are not grateful, especially for things that are difficult. We really have to try as hard as we can not to be superficial in the things we do in these months. Try to make our prayer with a focus. Try to make *muraqabah* with real intention. Try to take a time-pause and think about what it is that is affecting our attitude, emotions, mood, determinations, our discrimination, at times. Try very hard to affirm what we believe and be sincere in our questioning.

Allah Swt, not being just a being sitting on a throne, as we know, still is a Divine consciousness and presence. We can say, in shortspak, without getting into the

philosophy, that this Allah is going to respond to honesty and sincerity. If you have an honest and sincere question, that's all right. If you have an honest and sincere doubt, that's fine. But present it in a way that you are receptive to the response. We can't just call on Allah Swt when we are in trouble, and forget when the trouble is over. This is a message we have heard our whole lives. But it must not sink in, because we are still calling mostly when we are in trouble, and still not giving at least half that time to when everything is okay. What is that in human nature? Invariably, we are taken care of. I can't relate to you how many times in my life I felt there was no answer and no way. I didn't know what was coming next, and I couldn't plan. I felt repentant. I felt guilty. I felt abandoned. I can remember those times.

I called upon Allah and said, even at those times, "I feel very unworthy to call upon You, Allah, because I have not been calling upon You all along. You were the last one I called upon, not the first. You were the last thought in my mind, not the first." First I would defend something, or try to solve it myself, or ask someone else's advice, or avoided, or whatever. Then, "Oh, I should call upon Allah." And still, Allah removed the problem or ameliorated the issue. Maybe it seemed like it came from there or inside myself, or whatever: it doesn't matter. Clearly, it followed that calling. Every day I think about it. Too many times I've had that experience in my own life. Maybe one or two of you have had it. We really have to remember Allah Swt and not be forgetful.

We have to remember that the afflictions and tests are really the tests of our own sincerity, our own *iman*, our own *ikhlas*, our own *tawakkul*— tests of our own steadfastness and perseverance. Allah Swt loves those who are patient: **"Inallaha yuhibbus saberin. Inallaha ma'a saberin. He loves and assists those who persevere."** Let's not forget: I keep reminding myself that *sabr* is patience and perseverance. These are not exactly the same things. These tests come in so many ways: the tests of fear, of loss, of hunger, the tests of failure, the tests of property, fearing for our future, or for our

work, the tests of illness. Even the stories that are passed on to us that we hear about others' tests affect us.

There are people who think the world will come to an end in December of 2012. There are people who are very sorely affected by that. I saw a wonderful graphic of that; human beings floating in space. It didn't look too bad to me! I remember many years ago when we lived in Virginia Beach. The people from the yoga center and The Edgar Cayce Center came to me on the beach. "We're here to warn you. Edgar Cayce's grandson has had a vision that a tidal wave will hit Virginia Beach on this day. You are living right on the beach, and we wanted to warn you." We gave them some tea and coffee or whatever, and said, "Thank you very much. But I don't think it's going to happen." "How can you say that?" It was nice of them to come and warn us. I said, "What are you going to do?" "We are going out to the mountains in Virginia and pray for people." I said, "Why bother? Pray for people here." They said, "Would you like to join us?" I said, "No, thank you." "Why are you so sure nothing is going to happen?" I said, "Because I think Allah would have told me. I would know." Oh, the arrogant Shaykh Rashid! Well, the day came and the day went, and it was measured that the tide was 2 inches higher that day in Lynn Haven Inlet. So their prayers worked! *Alhamdulillah*. They went, and I didn't have to go, because their prayers worked. It's one way to look at it.

If we are strong in our faith, if we really value patience (and you are looking at someone who has a history of slight impatience), if we remember **Inallaha inna raja'un** (that we are in a cyclical journey), then I think we will be okay. We don't want fear to dominate us. The kind of fear that dominates us can be very subtle. It can be so habitual that we don't even think it is fear. We think it is opinion, we think it is right we have. We think it is knowledge we have acquired, but it comes from a fear basis. The behavior we see in people all around us is something to note. Those who suffer loss and are strong; those

who suffer illness and maintain their faith; those who have the capacity to express their needs but at the same time submit and surrender; these are good models for us.

I had a conversation today with someone who is ill about exactly this subject. I said that it's good to know what you really want, but this is a time you have to surrender and submit. It means you have to have a strong will, but eat what the doctor says, do as much as you can what the nutritionist says. Forget about taste. Things might taste terrible. Things you loved you may hate, but if it's to eat, you have to eat it. If it's for your health and well-being, you have to surrender. That is a form of Islam. You will find that you'll feel that Allah will make you safe and secure in that (*taslim*). It's a hard thing to swallow, so to speak, especially if you have a strong will and are very disciplined. I said, you are a very disciplined person, now use the discipline for surrender, not for control. There is always more to learn about the qualities and characteristics Allah has given us that are good ones.

I was so envious today when I was sitting with that person; I really was. That person was looking for some papers. I offered to help look. Oh, they are over there in the closet in the box called such and such. Boxes with drawers, each is labeled, everything has an envelope in it. What beautiful order! Not "Oh, no, I remember: it's in that sloppy group of papers on the floor." Four papers, lined up. Sloppy! What beautiful order.

Unfortunately, we find people blame Allah for their afflictions, and things happen to them. We also find that people who stick with their practices and really stay with them can go through all kinds of tests and trials and illnesses and come out the other side and sustain. Everybody? Maybe not. But it is a pattern I have seen over the years. There are people in this room who can attest to that.

When good things happen, how many of us really say, "Thank You, Allah"? Maybe we say *shukrana-Llāh*, or *alhamdulillah-Llāh*, or *subhāna-Llāh*, but do we really know what we are saying? Is it coming from our throat or our heart? How many of us take even one

minute to make some *du'ā*, or two minutes to make 2 *rak'ahs*, just to stop and do a time pause? I'm sure I can make a million dollars tomorrow with these two boys to write code tomorrow, and make an app called "the *rak'ah* app." I don't have time to make the *rak'ah*, but I have an app that will make the *rak'ah* for me. Someone once gave me an electronic *tasbeeh*, battery operated to count. What the heck is this all about? An electronic *tasbeeh*? Think about this *rak'ah* app. You can code it for 2, 3, or 4 *rak'ahs* extra, and make it so it has a *qunut* in it. The little hand goes up like that. You can make it so it recites it to you, and you can do it while driving. The upgrade will be for each prayer. Why not put the prayers in here, too? If you could, you could put an electric probe in it that would stimulate your muscles to make them twitch a little so you felt like you were actually making *rak'ahs*. Write it up, boys.

Really, we don't take the time. In Surah Bani Israel, Allah talks about our ungratefulness. **"When We bestow our favors on humankind, he turns away and becomes remote on his side, instead of coming to Us. When evil seizes him, he gives up to despair."** I think we can recognize that.

**Say, "O Allah, Lord of the power and rule, You give power to whomever you please, and take it from whomever you please. You exalt whomever You please, and You abase whomever you will. All that is good is in Your Hand. Indeed, You have power over all things."**

At least part of the subtext of these *'āyat* is posture. It says, "on your side." Why? How we present ourselves to Allah is extremely important. Our posture is dynamic. We don't kneel in prayer with our hands like this (folded). We don't just sit in a pew and pray. Our posture is extremely important. Allah is telling you, there is all this latitude. You can do it standing, sitting, and lying on your side. But you have to do it right, with the right attitude. People say, "I can't sleep. I have difficulty." I say, "Do all your prayers during the day. Lie in bed on your right side, or on the side facing Mecca, and pretend you are

praying. You will fall asleep.” Because of that posture and attitude, Allah will take you into the next state. It works, invariably, if you do it with sincerity. Will you be punished for praying lying down in bed? Not by the Allah I know. Just thinking of that is very important.

These are the months we are in to think about these things. Not in some *fiqhī* way, but in the heart way. These are the months that will help us, because there is special help from Allah in these months. How is that possible? Allah created the moon to be at different distances from the sun and the earth. It draws on a different power. The sun has a different effect on us. A solar flare has a different effect on us. Time and moments in the physical world are important. These are important times. If we fast and pray more correctly and do the extra *rak'ah* and make *du'ā* during these months, we adjust ourselves to this time frame, which travels, as you know, around the year. So we get to experience these times over 33 years under different circumstances.

*Alhamdulillah*, we can turn to Allah Swt and say, “Thank you Allah. The merry go round has gone around again; I’m in a merry mood and I’m going to try again. You have given us by Your grace and Your mercy another year. We don’t know what is going to happen tomorrow, but if You take us through this month of Rajab, and Sha’ban, and Ramadan, *Inshā’a-llāh* I will come out of it a much better person.” Nothing works better than a *du'ā*. In times of difficulty do *du'ā*. “O Lord, bless us with strength. Make us firm in our foothold and help us against those who reject the faith.” The real test of that faith is in prosperity and success.

*Alhamdulillah*, Allah Swt has given us in our work much success this year – but more work. More time it takes, more effort, more reason to be distracted, more reason not to turn toward Allah. What are we going to do, pray for success in our work, but not pray for the discipline to turn to Allah? The most difficult may be that: not just in pain, suffering, and illness. The real test is when things are okay and things are going well,

especially if you have been living a life when things have not been going well for a long time. Just as they start to go well, something happens. You become very conditioned to that expectation. If you read the *Ihya* of Imam al Ghazali, he addresses this subject. If we have pride in what we have accomplished, and a sense of contentment, then those tests may even be more difficult. **“This is a test of my Lord to test whether I am grateful or ungrateful.”** So we should ask Allah to test us in good ways, and develop our gratitude.

**And if Allah touches you with hurt, there is none that can remove it but He. If He designs some benefit for you, there is none who can keep back His favors. He causes it to reach to whomever of His servants He pleases. He is All Forgiving and much Merciful.**

So Allah, we plead with You. We pray to You and ask you that we can become thankful for our prosperity and patient in our adversity, and that we can be good Muslims and Muslimas in these months and years to come, if You grant us those months and years. Help us to make this Rajab a meaningful one, even a moment in it meaningful. O Allah, send Your *fayd*, blessing, *baraka*, *hubb*, *shifat* upon those who are ill, upon all of us who are well, and upon those who have passed. We ask Allah to help us to remain grateful and humble in our path. *Amin*. Please ask Allah for whatever you need. *Asalaam Aleikum*.