

“Indeed, the number of months with Allah is twelve [lunar] months in the register of Allah [from] the day He created the heavens and the earth; of these, four are sacred. That is the correct religion, so do not wrong yourselves during them...” (Qur’an, 9:36)

Alhamdulillah, we begin a new year this week - 1442 years after Hijrah, with the first month of the Islamic year - Muharram. In this month, we remember the day Prophet Musa(AS) and Bani Isra’eel were saved from Pharaoh on the Day of Ashura - the 10th of this month. The Day of Ashura is also shared with the tragedy at Karbala, when the Prophet Muhammad’s grandson, Imam Hussain (RA) who stood up for oppressed people and against injustice, subsequently sacrificed his own life for those principles.

Reflecting on the year past, it has definitely been eventful with the global pandemic COVID-19, Uighur Muslims in concentration camps in China, wars in Yemen and Syria, occupation of Kashmir and targeting of Muslims in Kashmir, normalisation of diplomatic relationships between the UAE and Israel, 300,000 residents of Beirut displaced with - these are just a few examples of those facing extreme hardship currently.

Of the four sacred months mentioned, some of the scholars are of the opinion that Muharram is the best because it follows Hajj and it’s a new start and is specifically named the month of Allah - shahrullah. This is the best month for voluntary fasting as the Prophet (SAW) stated in Sahih Muslim, 1163

The best fast after the month of Ramadan is fasting in the month of Allah, al-Muharram.

أَفْضَلُ الصِّيَامِ بَعْدَ شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ صِيَامُ شَهْرِ اللَّهِ الْمُحَرَّمِ

Its important that we recognise the past is a place of learning, not a place of living. I’d like to focus on the renewal we should all experience coming into this year.

Abdullah ibn Amr reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “Verily, the faith of one of you will wear out within him, just as a shirt becomes worn out, so ask Allah to renew faith in your hearts.” Source: al-Mustadrak 5

So how do we renew faith?

Your most precious asset

As stated in the hadith, **start off by asking Allah(SWT)** - the one who blessed you with faith, sustains you and the One who responds to your needs. I know what you're thinking - yes, I always make dua to Allah(SWT) - for the exam results, a job, children, my football team winning the next game etc. Yes, but don't forget to constantly ask Allah **to renew your iman** because your faith is your greatest blessing, it's your most precious asset.

عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِنَّ الْإِيمَانَ لِيَخْلُقُ فِي جَوْفِ أَحَدِكُمْ كَمَا يَخْلُقُ
التُّوبُ الْخَلْقُ فَاسْأَلُوا اللَّهَ أَنْ يُجَدِّدَ الْإِيمَانَ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ

المستدرك على الصحيحين 5

If that is gone, then everything else is not going to benefit you in anyway. Based on this Abdullah **ibn Mas'ud** (RA) would specifically ask: O Allah revive us in our faith and our certainty, and in our understanding. [**Allahumma zidna imana wa yaqina wa fiqha**]

Also, when sending Mu'adh (RA) to Yemen, the Messenger of Allah (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam) took hold of his hand and said: "O Mu'adh! By Allah I love you, so I advise you to never forget to recite after every prayer:

Allahumma a'innee alaa dhikrika, wa shukrika, wa husni 'ibaadatika

(O Allah, help me remember You, to be grateful to You, and to worship You in an excellent manner)." [Abu Dawud]

"Verily, the hearts of all the sons of Adam are between the two fingers out of the fingers of the Compassionate Lord as one heart. He turns that to any (direction) He likes. Then Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said: O Allah, the Turner of the hearts, turn our hearts to Your obedience." (Sahih Muslim, 2654)

اللَّهُمَّ مُصَرِّفَ الْقُلُوبِ صَرِّفْ قُلُوبَنَا عَلَى طَاعَتِكَ

(O Allah revive us in our faith, in our certainty, in our understanding.)

Abu Huraira reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "Renew your faith." They said, "O Messenger of Allah, how can we renew our faith?" The Prophet said, "**Say often there is no God but Allah.**" [Musnad Ahmad 8508]

The word Shahada is typically used to mean witnessing (usually with the eye) - see for your self. So how we do really understand this most important statement so we see for ourselves?

The word Ilah in Arabic has a number of possible origins. The word **Alaha** means to worship - so ilaah means there is no possibility of any other to be worshipped.

However, grammarians are also of the opinion that it is derived from the word **Aliha** 'alayhi - which refers to someone who is desperate and has no-one else to turn to. When we think we are completely alone and no one can help us possibly and there is none to turn to. That meaning is captured here.

And another opinion is that it comes from **Wuli'a** bihi - to be obsessed with someone, to be in need of someone. A complete dependence on another. When Musa(AS) led Bani Israeel in their thousands out of Egypt and they abandoned him and turned on him when they reached the sea before them and the army behind them. In this moment when he was entirely alone and not supported by anyone, he responded Kalaa - Never! Inna ma'iyah rabbi sa yahdeeni - Indeed my Lord is with me and He will guide me.

Research has linked social isolation and loneliness to higher risks for a variety of physical and mental conditions: high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, Alzheimer's disease, and even death.

People who find themselves unexpectedly alone due to the death of a spouse or partner, separation from friends or family, retirement, loss of mobility or break-up with friends are at particular risk. In fact, know that the only One who has been with you and will continue with you through every difficulty isn't your best friend, your gaming buddy, your partner or even your parents. Who was there when you were in your womb. It doesn't matter if your friends, family or society abandons you. When they're there you are happy and if they're not there, you the One you love isn't there, you cant be happy. The word for that in Arabic is walah which according to many grammarians is the origin of the word ilaah. In other there is no genuine love, no real happiness that a human being can find with Allah absent from their heart. Joy cannot exist. Happiness cannot exist ... without Allah. And that is part of the meaning of Laa ilaha illAllah

In the 7th century there was an Arab Bedouin poet by the name of Qays ibn al-Mullawah and

his love Layla bint Mahdi, which we know as the stories of Layla and Majnoon because he was infatuated to the point of madness by his love from her. It is narrated that once he spotted Layla's dog in the streets of the city and immediately began following it as it reminded him of his beloved.

He followed the dog through windy streets and tight alleys even passing by a congregation who had begun their prayers. He continued past them following the dog until it arrived at the house of Layla and slipped through the gates inside. He pined at the gates for a while and then eventually, returned following his footsteps the way he had come. When he returned past the congregation who had long-finished their prayers, they called out to him and lamented the fact he had not joined them for prayers. "How could you miss your prayers when you passed right by us?" they asked.

He replied "Apologies, my friends. I was so focused and obsessed with the thoughts of Layla, I didn't even see you. But how is it that you were in conversation with Allah(SWT) himself and you saw me?"

One of the lessons from the story is that our love increases the more we think about something or talk about it. So, it goes without saying that the more we read of Allah's word - the Qur'an - and think and discuss it, the more our love of Allah(SWT) will increase. Similarly, remembering Allah more through our dhikr will inevitably increase our consciousness and love of Him(SWT).

Samurah ibn Jundab reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "The most beloved words to Allah are four: glory be to Allah, praise be to Allah, there is no god but Allah, and Allah is the greatest. There is no harm in starting with any of them." [Sahih Muslim 2137]