

ARTICLE

What to do at the time of Natural Catastrophes

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Everyone is aware of the devastation caused by the recent earthquake in the Indian Ocean. According to reports over 125,000 people have lost their lives, hundreds of thousands have lost their relatives, entire communities have been wiped out and countless buildings and properties have been destroyed. Over a million people have been left homeless, having lost everything they once owned, now living under open skies with nothing to eat and cover themselves with. And the death toll may rise further as the spread of disease is very likely to occur if adequate assistance is not provided in time.

When such calamities strike, one often ponders over one's role and responsibility, as a human being and as a Muslim. It is unfortunate that for most of us, it takes such calamities to make us reflect on the Power and lofty Attributes of Allah ta'aalaa. Rather than expressing shallow sorrow and a momentary shock, there are a few points that we need to reflect and act upon, so that events like these can cause us to become better Muslims for the rest of our lives:

1. Allah ta'aalaa is the Hakim (The Supreme Ruler) and the Hakeem (The Most Wise)

First of all, one has to reaffirm in one's mind and heart that whatever happens, whether good or bad in appearance, is according to the Wish of Allah ta'aalaa. Allah ta'aalaa is Hākim i.e. He has Power over everything. Every single particle in the whole universe is under His Control. The turning of the leaf in the air while it is falling from the tree, to the up turning and shaking of the earth itself, as in the case of an earthquake, everything is in His Absolute Control. The commands, wishes and controls of everyone else are subjugated to His Command and Governance. The varied circumstances that one observes or experiences in one's life are also in His total Control.

There are many incidents and events in a person's life, during which one hopes for a positive outcome through worldly means e.g. when a relative is seriously ill we can hope for recovery by consulting a specialist, along with our belief that only that will happen which Allah ta'aalaa has ordained. Nevertheless we take the help of worldly means to satisfy ourselves and try to rectify the situation to the best of our ability.

However, when faced with natural disasters like storms, earthquakes and floods, there is no hope of any worldly means which we can employ to circumvent, overcome or prevent re-occurrence of such situations. Such natural disasters are entirely in the Control of Almighty Allah and we are forced to acknowledge that. Indeed as Muslims we should never have disregarded and ignored the Absolute Power of Allah ta'aalaa and it should have been reflected upon in our day to day actions and deeds.

However, it is comforting to know that Allah ta'aalaa is not only the Hākim (The Supreme Commander) but He is also the Hakeem (The Most Wise). Allah ta'aalaa's Governance of the universe is unlike that of worldly rulers. His Control and Governance is full of Supreme Wisdom and Divine Justice. Hence even in calamities, such as this earthquake, there is the hidden Wisdom of the Almighty, which may not be apparent to our physical eyes.

2. Turn Towards Allah ta'aalaa in Repentance

Every person, during such times should turn towards Allah ta'aalaa with humbleness, faith and genuine repentance. According to the Sharee'ah, common and open disobedience of Allah ta'aalaa is one of the many reasons for the cause of calamities like earthquakes. When the land is overloaded with the disobedience of Allah ta'aalaa, earthquakes from beneath and violent storms from above are commonplace. There are quite a few scientific explanations for earthquakes and tsunamis, however the underlying facts point towards 'how' they happen and not 'why' they happen. The answer to 'why' and 'when' and even to 'how', in reality, remains with Allah ta'aalaa. An answer to 'why' has been revealed in the Qur'aan:

(Corruption and) Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of men have earned, that He (Allah) may give them a taste of some of their deeds in order that they may turn back (from evil). (30:41)

Incidents like these are, as it were, 'wakeup' alarm calls from Allah ta'aalaa. Allah ta'aalaa in His Infinite Mercy is jolting us through such incidents, so that we may mend our ways and reflect on our transgressions and as a result rectify ourselves before it is too late. Allah ta'aalaa has revealed to his beloved Prophet sallallahu alayhi wasallam, that as long as this Ummah continues to repent for their wrong-doings, He will not punish them through calamities. Incidents like these should not be viewed with some momentary sympathy or investigated out of curiosity, but treated strictly as a reminder to wake up and reflect on our lives of disobedience. The very Allah who has the Power to cause an earthquake in the watery depths of the Indian Ocean also has the Power to cause any other catastrophe here, in this very city, in the very vicinity of our homes.

Hence it is absolutely essential for Muslims, not just from the affected regions, but from all over the world, to turn towards Allah ta'aalaa. They must direct all their attention towards Him and reflect on their lives to find out where the Commands of Allah ta'aalaa are being violated, then sincerely repent and resolve to adorn their future lives with taqwā, abstain from the disobedience of Allah ta'aalaa, and observe His Commands.

3. Pray for the Afflicted

Our beloved Prophet sallallahu alayhi wasallam has commanded us to support and help the victims of calamities, whether they be Muslims or otherwise. The best and the most valuable support and help is to make du'a i.e. sincere prayers for the wellbeing of the victims. Du'a is a very powerful and potent means, which is available to each and every one of us, the one with worldly resources as well as the one without. Hence one should sincerely pray for the well being of the victims. One should pray that Allah ta'aalaa gives them strength, patience and comfort and that He protects and guides them through these critical times and provides rapid recovery from their physical, mental and spiritual wounds. Only Allah ta'aalaa has the ability to provide the things asked for in the above prayers. No amount of worldly means will provide for the loss that has been suffered by the victims.

It is difficult to comprehend or empathise with the situation of the victims. Scores of them have death hovering over their heads while their dead family members lie beside them. Thousands of dead bodies lie in the water piled up like logs unable to receive a proper burial. Thousands of people have lost their sons and daughters and thousands of young children have become orphans. Only prayers will help those people. So take out some time from listening to the news, reading newspaper reports and chatting about the events and bow down to Allah ta'aalaa, and pray sincerely and earnestly (after making repentance) for the victims of the calamity. The victims certainly deserve our prayers, to say the least. It is their right over the entire Muslim community.

It is also worth mentioning that it will be a gross transgression for anyone to forget their own deeds and start judging the victims, claiming their misdeeds to be the reason for the calamity. We are in no position to do that. Besides, this will be tantamount to trying to guess the 'Hikmah' (Wisdom) of Allah! Therefore we should refrain from uttering such words.

4. Donate Generously

For people far from the afflicted region, the next best thing that they can do to help and support is to provide financial and material help. The victims have lost everything, their homes and the shelter above their heads, their entire belongings and their livelihoods. There is an immediate need to provide shelter (as a protection from the cold nights), food and clothing. There is also a dire need to provide them with medication and other medical accessories and supply them with clean water and sanitation.

Alhamdulillah, Allah ta'aalaa has given us abundantly, more than we need. We do not have to sacrifice our daily food or clothing in order to donate towards the cause. I request all my brothers and sisters to reflect upon the material blessings that Allah ta'aalaa has bestowed upon us, despite our not being deserving of them, and donate generously for the victims of this calamity. There are people out there, among the victims, who, until yesterday, were the patrons of or contributors towards charities themselves, and had donated profusely. Now, having lost everything, they are in need of charity themselves. Allah ta'aalaa will inshā'allah look favourably upon our generosity and remove future calamities awaiting to befall us. The Prophet sallallahu alayhi wasallam has mentioned:

Truly sadaqah extinguishes the Wrath of Allah and saves from an evil death. (Tirmidhi)

So, as human beings, and more so as Muslims, we should not let this suffering continue without providing help and support according to our individual capabilities. Do not wait for your Zakāh to become due to make a donation. The need of the situation demands that we donate everything that is in our possession, even if that means undergoing hardships ourselves. However, since Allah ta'aalaa has blessed us with adequate wealth we know that we can donate sufficiently without having to undergo such troubles. We should spend abundantly and generously, as generously as Allah ta'aalaa has provided for us. Remember, whatever we will spend, we will do so from that which Allah ta'aalaa has given us. It is His Money we will be spending to relieve His Creation. The Prophet sallallahu alayhi wasallam said:

All creatures are the dependants of Allah. The most beloved to Allah from all Creation is he who treats His dependants the best. (Bayhaqi)

Therefore give as much as you can. This is not a time to wait for someone to come and knock at your door. Go out looking for reliable organizations and charities with correct channels, so that your money reaches the genuine victims and fulfills their needs.

May Allah ta'aalaa give us the guidance to learn a lesson from such calamities and grant us the resolve to change our lives for the better. May Allah ta'aalaa also give us the tawfeeq to pray for the victims and to donate generously. Ameen.