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Away From Home

A few minutes on a Saturday morning have shaken an entire nation for years to come. The earthquake on the 8th of October changed the lives of millions of Pakistanis and altered the beliefs and thoughts of many others around the world. I am one such person.

As a student at the American University of Sharjah (AUS), I thought my world had come to an end when I heard about the earthquake. I cannot express the panic and tension that I felt as I tried calling home that morning. It was impossible to get through to mobile phones. Being away from home, one imagines the worst possible scenario. Ten different questions come to mind with no answer... just uncertainty, till finally you get to hear the voice of a loved one telling you everything is okay.

Studying here at AUS, us Pakistanis had to go on with our classes as usual (Saturday is a working day in UAE). Hundreds of people around us were continuing with their meaningless day to day activities, while we tried calling our family and friends during classes to find out if everyone was ok. You don't really know what to feel here. You hear about an earthquake and the disaster that it has caused, but at the same time you didn't feel anything, you can't see anything. Most of us do not even have access to news channels on the television so we were relying mostly on the Internet and whatever phone calls we got from home.

I realize now more than ever before how fragile human life is. All it takes is that one second and your life could be over. One minute you are going on with your life and the next minute your time is up. We claim to have progressed and become better than our ancestors yet death for us is the same as it was for them. No technology or development can save us. I see the implications of the phrase "to Allah we belong and to Him is our return". We cannot stop what He has written for us. As humans we can try our best to take preventive measures but who knows if they will be enough or not. In the end Allah knows best. He gives life and He takes life.

What impressed me most was the immediate action that Pakistanis took to help the victims of this natural disaster. I am not aware of what the government is doing or how much aid foreign countries have given (I am sure both government aid and foreign aid have helped many victims) but all the civilians who started their own campaigns and relief efforts inspire me. They have proved to me that in times of need, Pakistanis do show a sense of unity. Those who have the resources are helping the homeless. The month of Ramadan and the blessings it brings also encourage people to help out for the reward they hope to get. Here at AUS, our Pakistani community arranged a campaign, asking everyone to donate funds, tents, blankets etc. The Pakistani Cultural Club worked tirelessly going from person to person, explaining the situation and asking for whatever little people were willing to offer.

I do not know how long it will take us as a nation to recover from this disaster. I pray for those who have lost their lives or lost loved ones and I pray for the homeless. I hope that Allah will help Pakistanis through this time of need. As for us, the masses, we need to stay united and help as many people as we possibly can. This earthquake is a lesson we should not forget.