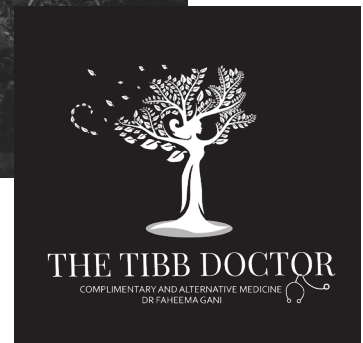


Dr Faheema Gani



RAMADAN HOLISTIC HEALTH AND WELLNESS GUIDE



A FULL SPECTRUM GUIDE INTO
SPIRITUALITY, MENTAL HEALTH
AND FITNESS THIS RAMADAN

Dr Faheema Gani



RAMADAN HOLISTIC
HEALTH AND
WELLNESS GUIDE



THE TIBB DOCT
COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE
OF RAMADAN

A FULL SPECTRUM
SPIRITUAL
AND

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QUALITY, MENTAL HEA
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Physical Tools

The physiology of fasting:

Fat loss

The changes that occur in the body in response to fasting depend on the length of the continuous fast. The body enters into a fasting state eight hours or so after the last meal, when the gut finishes absorption of nutrients from the food. In the normal state, blood glucose, which is stored in the liver and muscles, is the body's main source of energy. During a fast, this store of glucose is used up first to provide energy. Later in the fast, once the stores of glucose run out, fat becomes the next source of energy for the body. Your body will try to preserve protein for as long as possible before breaking it down to use for energy.

As the Ramadaan fast only extends from dawn till dusk, there is ample opportunity to replenish energy stores at pre-dawn and dusk meals.

This provides a progressive, gentle transition from using glucose to fat as the main source of energy, and prevents the breakdown of muscle provided we are still physically active during the month. The use of fat for energy aids weight loss, preserves the muscles, and in the long run reduces your cholesterol levels. In addition, weight loss results in better control of diabetes and reduces blood pressure.

Autophagy

Autophagy is your body's detoxification process which involves reusing old and damaged cell parts. Cells are the basic building blocks of every tissue and organ in your body.





Each cell contains multiple parts that keep it functioning. Over time, these parts can become defective or stop working. Autophagy is your body's cellular recycling system. It allows a cell to disassemble its junk parts and repurpose the salvageable bits and pieces into new, usable cell parts. A cell can discard the parts it doesn't need. Autophagy is also quality control for your cells. Too many junk components in a cell take up space and can slow or prevent a cell from functioning correctly. Autophagy remakes the clutter into the selected cell components you need, optimizing your cells' performance.

Hormones

After a few days of the fast, higher levels of certain hormones appear in the blood resulting in a better level of alertness and an overall feeling of general mental well-being:

Insulin levels. Blood levels of insulin drop significantly, which facilitates fat burning and protects against insulin resistance by increasing your cells sensitivity to insulin.

Human growth hormone (HGH) levels. The blood levels of human growth hormone (HGH) may increase dramatically. Higher levels of this hormone facilitate fat burning and muscle gain, and have numerous other benefits for the brain.

Gene expression. There are beneficial changes in several genes and molecules related to longevity and protection against disease.



Fasting protocol

The physiology and benefits mentioned above are directly linked to the length of the fast as well as the quality of foods we consume during the non-fasting hours. Therefore, to increase the benefits we must include a certain level of discipline with regards to the foods we eat at suhoor & iftar.

Suhoor

Our current hours of fasting during Ramadaan is 14hrs. As mentioned earlier - it takes about 8hrs from the last meal before our body physiologically enters fasting mode. This leaves us with approximately 6 hours of physiological fasting per day. We can extend this from 6hrs to 12hrs by one small change which would be keeping suhoor light enough that it doesn't spike glucose & insulin. Keeping this in mind - my personal recommendation would be to have a light suhoor (2 dates & water) to fulfill the sunnah of the pre-dawn meal. This would technically mean our last full meal was the iftar meal - and our physiological fast starts at least 6 hours earlier than it would normally.

The Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad is to eat light. Suhoor is only for the purpose of Barakah. The Prophet (peace be upon him) would have just a few mouthfuls to keep him going, and he did not seek out any particular food for suhoor, other than dates. The Prophet (peace be upon him) spoke highly of dates and said: "What a good suhoor for the believer dates are." Narrated by Abu Dawood (2345); classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Abi Dawood.

Following this sunnah ensures that we spike glucose just enough to wake us up and start the circadian rhythm for the day, but we are reducing the spike of insulin (due to high fiber & low glycemic index of dates). We are also reducing the amount of glucose stored in the liver. This is important because the less stored glucose we have - the quicker our body will enter the physiological state of fasting.

Iftar

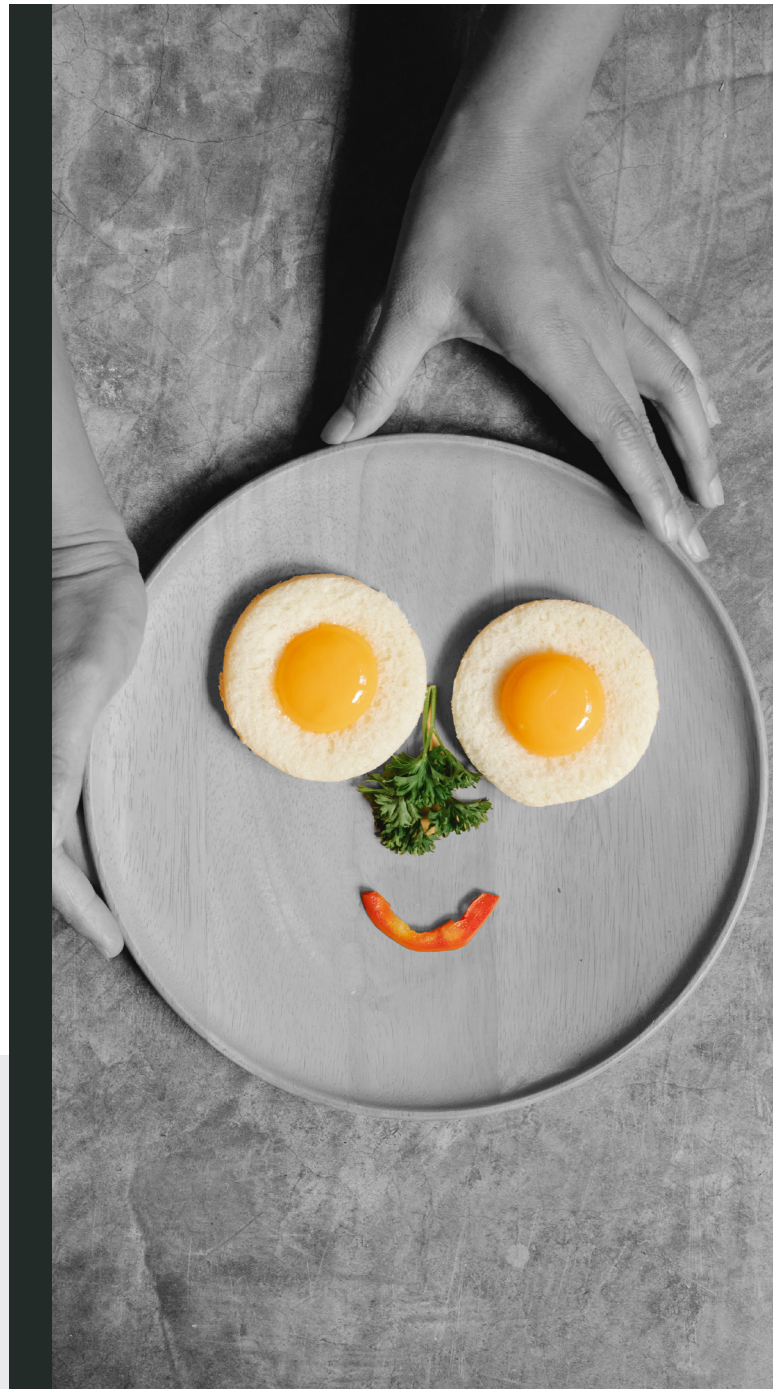
When breaking the fast - overeating can not only harm the body but it is thought also to interfere with a person's spiritual growth during the month. A diet that has less than a normal amount of food but is sufficiently balanced will keep a person healthy and active during the month of Ramadaan. The diet should be simple and not differ too much from one's normal everyday diet. It should contain foods from all the major food groups.



- Complex carbohydrates (foods that will help release energy slowly during the long hours of fasting. Complex carbohydrates are found in grains and seeds, like barley, wheat, oats, millets, semolina, beans, lentils, wholemeal flour, basmati rice, etc.)
- Fruits/veggies (Fibre-rich foods are also digested slowly and will support the gut microbiome during periods of prolonged fasting).
- A high quality protein source
- A healthy fat source (avocados, nuts, seeds, olive oil, butter, full cream dairy products)
- Water with a pinch of sea salt to rehydrate and restore electrolytes.

Foods to avoid are the heavily-processed, fast-burning foods that contain refined carbohydrates in the form of sugar, white flour, etc., as well as, of course, too much fatty food (e.g. deep fried savories, cakes, biscuits, chocolates and sweets, sodas and fruit juices).

It may also be worth avoiding the caffeine content in drinks such as tea, coffee and cola. Caffeine is a diuretic and stimulates faster water loss through urination.





Training during Ramadaan

There is strong evidence to suggest that maximal exercise performance is negatively affected during Ramadaan. Training schedules will differ depending on the individual's goals and performance outside of Ramadaan.

Calorie intake

If you are an athlete and your goal is to maintain weight and performance, you should try to consume the amount equivalent to your energy intake during the non-fasting period. Fasting athletes could adopt a general pattern of intake that is similar to their diet when they are not fasting; with the difference being the timing or schedule of the meal sitting.

If you are not consistent with training out of Ramadaan and your goal is to lose weight, you may adopt a minor deficit (300 calories) but understand that it will affect performance.

Hydration

It is extremely important to stay hydrated during the non-fasting hours. It is recommended that the fluid intake be 0.5 to 0.75 L every hour post-breaking fast in the evening until bedtime. Adding an electrolyte powder or simply a pinch of sea salt to your water will be beneficial at restoring electrolytes. Limit/Avoid caffeine if possible as this will increase water loss.

It is best to adopt a "grazing" drinking plan throughout the evening period, rather than within a short period of time (e.g. within an hour). Consuming too much fluid within a short span of time, as in the latter scenario, would result in an increased urine output leading to a less than optimal net fluid retention.

Training Intensity:

Fasting Muslims should train at a relatively lower training load and/ or intensity than usual. Avoid high intensity, prolonged continuous (i.e. > 1.5 hours and >80% of an individual's maximal heart rate) exercise in the daytime during Ramadaan. The rationale for this is simply because the main fuel used during such high-intensity exercise is primarily muscle glycogen and blood glucose (towards the latter part of the exercise duration), and studies have shown that exercise of such duration and intensity could be limited by the availability of endogenous glycogen stores.

Timing of training:

The best time to train would depend on your body, your goals, your daily schedule and your training prior to Ramadaan.

Morning

If you usually rely on glucose in your system from a pre-workout meal, you would benefit from training immediately after fajr (you'll have the added assistance of cortisol present in the mornings for increased energy).

Afternoon

If you generally train better on an empty stomach - late afternoon sessions would be more beneficial for you as you would be able to get your post-workout meal in at iftar shortly after to nourish all of the depleted muscle.

Evening

If you are already a consistent athlete and your goal is to maintain or improve your fitness during Ramadaan - training for improvements should preferably be done in the evenings post-breaking of the day's fast. In this case, an athlete would typically break their fast with a light meal followed by a short break of 60 minutes to allow the food in the stomach to be digested and blood glucose levels enhanced before performing the demanding physical session. Note that your sleep schedule will be negatively affected by this and you may need a daily afternoon nap to ensure proper recovery.

Note that physically taxing training sessions should be reduced to once a day during Ramadaan. All training sessions, where possible, should be performed in a shaded, cool environment to reduce the environmental heat stress that could exacerbate the effects of fasting.

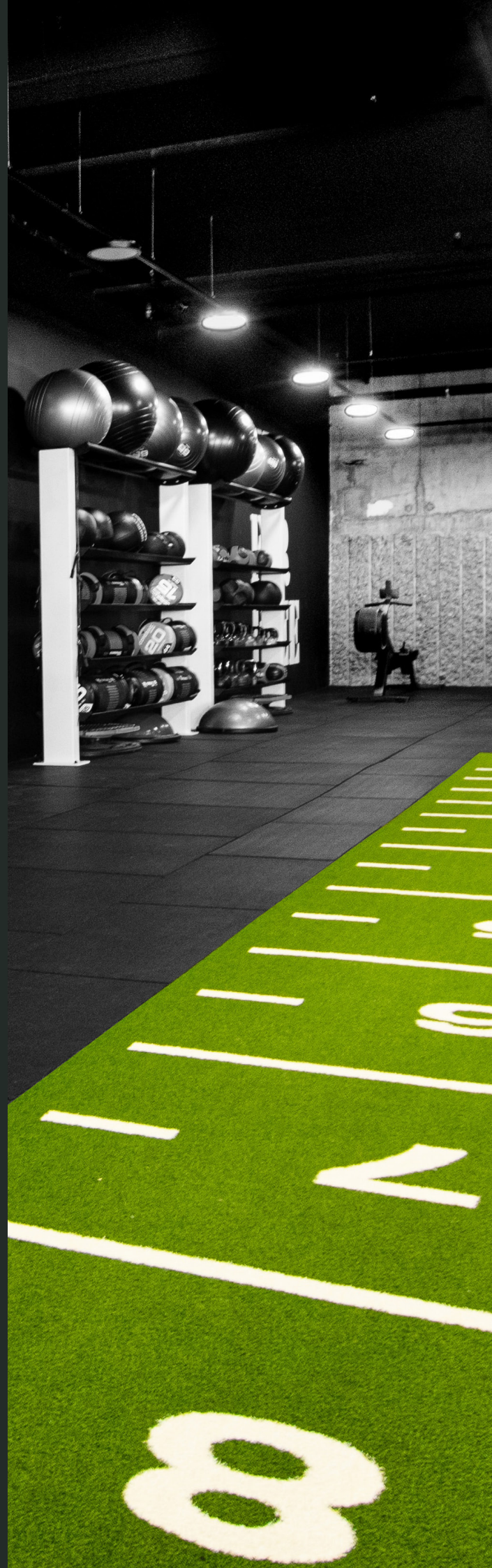
Supplement protocol

Recommended:

- Vitamin B complex - at suhoor to reduce physical and mental fatigue
- Electrolyte solution or coconut water at iftaar to rehydrate and restore electrolyte balance
- Omega-3 Fatty Acids: Reduce hunger and appetite
- Iron: if you are anemic or a female of reproductive age with an iron deficiency

Optional:

- Curcumin: Decrease insulin resistance
- Medium-Chain Triglycerides (MCTs): Assist metabolism
- Vitamin C - Assist immune system



Mental Tools

Gratitude as a practice

GratITUDE is known to enhance positive emotions, increase self-esteem, make us more optimistic, increase our resilience and make us more giving.

In addition to this, gratitude is known to make us more effective leaders, improve decision-making, and help us find meaning in our work. This is in addition to a host of physical and health benefits.

Gratitude can also release toxic emotions, The limbic system is the part of the brain that is responsible for all emotional experience. Studies have shown that the hippocampus and amygdala, the two main sites regulating emotions, memory and bodily functioning are upregulated with gratitude.

Gratitude may have profound effects on the body's nervous system. When you are relaxed and feeling positive emotions, your body shifts into a parasympathetic state, which allows your nervous system to rest. gratitude can also activate the hypothalamus. This activation can promote deeper sleep, and improved metabolic function and can upregulate the immune system by lowering cortisol and boosting iga.

Meditation

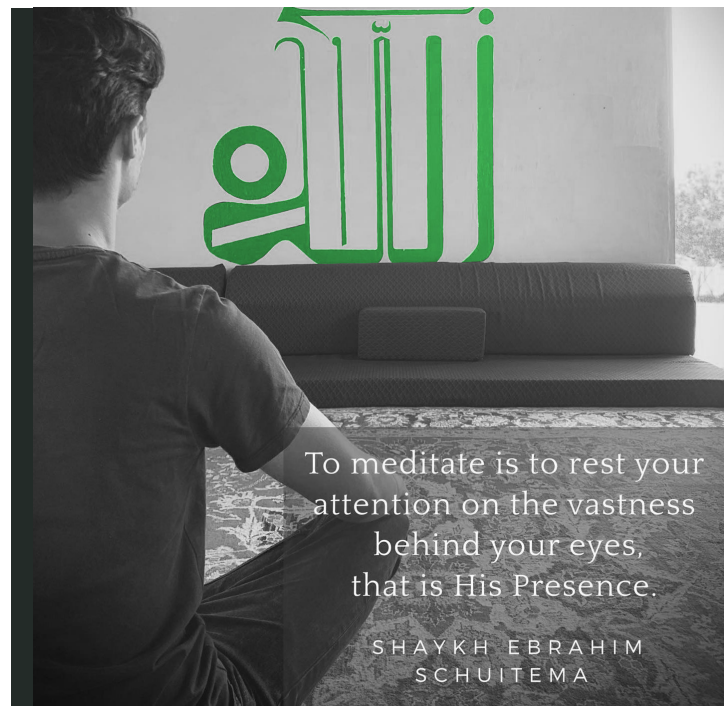
This practice seeks to achieve two things:

1. Silence internal dialogue
2. Change the nature of our internal dialogue into something benign: from an ambience of resentment to an ambience of gratitude.

The key to meditation is 'resting your attention' and not focussing. When you rest your attention on the three sounds try not to focus on them, we are 'listening' rather than 'looking' at the sounds. When we rest our attention on the sound of our body, we are listening to what our body is telling us, its present story. This conversation takes the form of sensations in the body. If we liken our senses to computer programs, we want our programmes 'running in the back-ground', still present, but not being used.

How to meditate

We are resting and not focussing, in order to let go, in order to develop a 'receptive' way of using our attention. When your attention wanders in the meditation just bring it back. Be patient and do not give yourself a hard time, you will get there.



- Make sure that you are sitting comfortably, sit on a pillow if you like, cross your legs and keep your back straight.
- Look around the room and visually identify three things in the room (e.g. red/black/green)
- Close your eyes and identify three sounds, the furthest away first, then bring them closer.
- Breathe deep from the belly, not your chest. Scan the body for any tension, if you find any try to let it go by relaxing those areas with tension.
- After this process - finally bring your attention to your breathing. Then breathe in with the syllable “Al” and breath out with “llah”, thus forming the full word “Allah”, the Divine Name. Do not articulate the name with your tongue. It is as if you are hearing it being whispered on your breath.
- When your attention wanders to something else, bring it back to your breath. Try to relax, slow down your heart rate and try to quieten your mind.
- Sit for minimum 20 min’s, ideally 40 min’s. Take a minute or so to come out. The ideal time for this is just before or after the Fajr salah.

(Extract from The Practice of Intent, Shaykh Ebrahim Schuitema)

Spiritual Tools

Spirituality & food

Food has a great significance in Islam. It is associated with one’s relationship with God. Chapter 20, verse 81 of the Qur’an states: “Eat of the good and wholesome things that We have provided for your sustenance, but indulge in no excess therein.”

The physical body is a gift from God; it is given to humans in trust to take care of it for a fixed period. How much food is consumed and the choice of food has a direct impact on the physical and spiritual well-being of the person. The food that you consume affects your behavior and personality. Wholesome, natural and healthy food assists the development of a good personality. Overeating has long been frowned upon in Islam as it is thought to increase worldly appetites and cause sluggishness, thereby ‘dulling’ the soul, hampering spiritual growth and increasing physical ailments.

The blessed Prophet said: “The children of Adam fill no vessel worse than their stomach. Sufficient for him is a few morsels to keep his back straight. If he must eat more, then a third should be for his food, a third for his drink, and a third left for air.” (Sunan al-Tirmidhi)

Islam sees health and ‘well-being’ as much more than just bodily health: well-being or tranquility requires a strong relationship with one’s spirituality, good physical health, mental happiness, a sense of purpose and good character and relationships. Islam makes a strong connection between food and worship and teaches that all forms of worship have a deeper purpose and impact and contribute in some way to individual and social well-being.

In chapter 7, verse 31 the Qur’an is categorical: “Eat and drink freely: but waste not by excess, for He does not like the wasters. Islam thus creates a sense of responsibility in people to take a healthy living lifestyle as normal. Fasting in the month of Ramadaan teaches us to manage and practice spirituality and not to eat excessively. The essential part of spirituality in food is that we are grateful and thankful for the food we get.

The blessed Prophet once said: “God has a right over you; your body has a right over you.” To strike a balance between the needs of the physical body and your spiritual needs, you must on the one hand consume the right type and amount of food and on the other hand develop excellent interpersonal skills. The blessed Prophet Muhammad said: “I have only been sent for the perfection of character”. Fasting in the month of Ramadaan is an opportunity to make significant changes in your lifestyle and develop the resolve to make healthy living choices.



Changing your mindset in Ramadaan

It could be more beneficial to focus more on the quality of your spiritual practice rather than the quantity. Fulfilling our spiritual obligations is important, as they are essential in reaching God's pleasure and attaining clarity. Quality spiritual practice amends the way you perceive the universe. It enables us to witness the shadow of the Divine Hand over every occurrence .

This can cultivate qualities such as compassion, courtesy, serenity, and stillness, which are noticeable to both ourselves and others. Instead of exhausting ourselves with empty acts, perhaps it would be better to let go of inaccurate perceptions that keep us trapped in a cycle of unease.

It was narrated from Abu Hurairah that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

“There are people who fast and get nothing from their fast except hunger, and there are those who pray and get nothing from their prayer but a sleepless night.”

How do we reach our spiritual goals in Ramadaan?

Here are few ideas to move forward

Stay present in our prayer, how to start.

We've been taught how to pray Salaah, but many of us usually find issues in staying present and building a connection in our prayer. Here's a good start on how to become aware of what we are actually doing when praying.

- When you walk onto the musallah (prayer mat) for your salah (formal prayer) become present by bringing your attention into the room.
- Look around the room and visually identify three things in the room, then identify three sounds, rest your attention on both.
- Then look down, identify three points on your prayer mat, rest your attention on them. Feel your feet on the prayer mat, your toes sinking into the rug or the sole of your feet against the mat. Register that you are standing on the musallah, then say your niyyah (intention). If your attention starts to wander, become present again by revisiting your points of reference. You will notice an immense increase in your concentration while doing your salah and consequently an immense benefit in doing your salah.
- Salah is more than language and recital. It is like an action exercise. If one wishes to increase concentration in salah, then one must start concentration in wudu (ablution). Try doing wudu with cold water. Feel the water and the movement of your hands with the water during wudu.

- The essence of the salah is in the postures. If we execute the postures mindfully we cultivate awareness. A person's salah is accepted, 'accepted' meaning transformative and useful to them, if they do the postures deliberately, because the postures are saying something to your entire being. Ruku is saying something to your entire being, sajdah is saying something to your entire being.
- The reason why we put our attention into the room is in order to become present. Being present is being present in the room, in the place where you are. The salah is only meaningful if the person doing the salah is actually present doing the salah.

(Extract from The Practice of Intent, Shaykh Ebrahim Schuitema)

Giving back and spending time with those in need

One of our duties and goals is gratitude. Giving charity enables gratitude, it allows us to be physically present with those we consider to be less fortunate. Gratitude allows us to find meaning in the things we generally do and to hold a high standard of empathy for the people around us. This will ultimately increase our overall mood and experience of the world around us.

"Wherever you turn is the face of Allah", gratitude allows us to experience this at all times in combination with Salaah which brings us back to reality.

Spending time with family and building good relationships

If your relationship with family has been a bit rocky, Ramadaan is the time for growth and change, use the time after breaking your fast to build the relationship with your family. Help your mom in the kitchen, lay the Iftaar table, pour the water. Empathize with your household, the day of fasting was tough on everybody so be kind and helpful, the perfect time to be selfless is when all you can think about is self preservation.

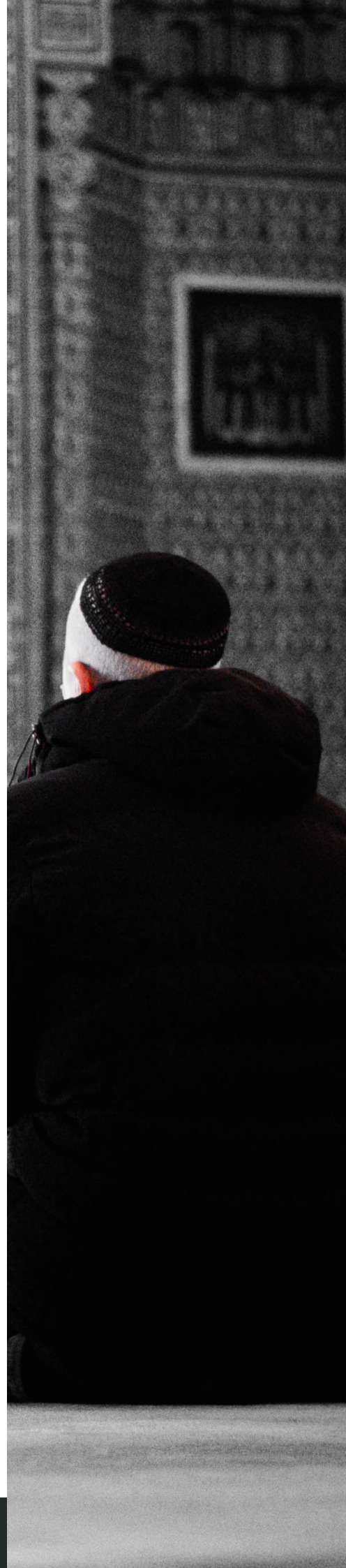
Breaking routines and habits

Ramadaan is, as a matter of fact, all about breaking habits. This is the real and inner meaning of fasting, because by breaking habits we deprive ourselves of certain indulgences, apart from the satisfaction of our physical needs, which have virtually become part of our nature.

One big goal to have during Ramadaan is to break our bad routines and habits. If you usually wake up late, fasting is the perfect time and motivation to get up early and start your day.

Smokers, an entire day without smoking proves that the addiction is mind over matter, our conviction takes precedence over what we want and even what we need to survive. Use this time to cut the habit. Our body is a gift and a responsibility, when we return it and return it we shall, let us say that we used it in the best of ways.

Adjusting to a new routine is the same as any exercise. At first, it can be a little uncomfortable. Maybe difficult. And definitely not as easy as something we are used to. But when our mind and body work in unison, there are no limits to what we can achieve.





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