

April 24, 2020 - May 3, 2020

Ramadan is an Islamic holiday that lasts 30 days in which Muslims throughout the world fast and refrain from eating food and drinking any liquid. Essentially forbidding to have any sustenance or nutrition from sunrise to sundown. It doesn't occur at the same time each year because Ramadan is based on the lunar calendar and moves back 10 days each year. So this year it started on April 24, next year it will start on April 14.

It's not just a physical fast, but a spiritual one as well. It's a month to build good habits and become closer to god. Some Muslims try to quit bad habits during this month, some build good habits. Everyone sets a goal of having a good habit built by the end of Ramadan.

You wake up before sunrise to eat and pray, then return to sleep. Then if you have a job, you go about your day as normal. You break your fast at sundown. Depending on where you live, a person can fast from 8 hours to 18 hours to 22 hours. A favorite habit of mine is eating a fruit when I break my fast. Fruits become extremely flavorful when your tongue isn't covered in what you usually eat.

One thing you quickly notice is how much time you spend eating and drinking during the day.

You have lots of free time and, luckily, classes coincided with Ramadan so I can busy myself with work. But it's very difficult to get stuff done because the lack of food and water makes you really groggy.

The first 10 days, you really notice the physical effects. I usually feel exhausted waking up. As if I had a heavy exercise the day before, my muscles ache with soreness and pain every morning making it difficult to get out of bed.

The body takes time to acclimate to fasting. Your energy levels fluctuate as your body grows accustomed to the fasting state. Sometimes I find I have the same amount of energy or more once I get out of bed and start my day. Sometimes you wake up starving and dehydrated.

The body takes time to acclimate to fasting. It's difficult to keep a consistent exercise routine because too heavy of a workout can cause some problems. Coughing fits that last a while, extreme dehydrations, cramps, and other problems I haven't personally experienced.

There are plenty of health benefits of fasting such as cleaning your body from toxins and the unhealthy foods you eat. Ramadan is time to create better habits and break bad habits. You are given 30 days to try to break bad habits and start good ones. You do your best and carry on the good habits when Ramadan is over.

Along with the benefits and consistent exhaustion, the dreams during fasting become strange. Some people I know have had spiritual awakenings in dreams, I've had similar experiences but not to the extent they have described. My dreams are usually strange and sometimes metaphorical.

My dreams this Ramadan have been strange each day and that has been consistent since 2018. I once had a dream of being a cat who could predict the future but no one believed.

The most poignant dream I had this year was my walking into a room and seeing friends and family I haven't seen in 10+ years. It was a great seeing old friends even though it was a dream.

I guess I just miss my friends.

Especially now, during the shutdown, I've realized something that I hadn't realized before.

Ramadan is not just a fast from your usual habits. It's not just a way to become more spiritual.

It's a practice of humility.

May 4, 2020 - May 13, 2020

The middle 10 days of Ramadan might feel the longest. You have the routine down. Your body is completely used to fasting. And the days are getting longer.

This year is different because I'm used to seeing family and friends during Ramadan, but the shutdown has changed all that. I realized that Ramadan is more than just fasting. It's a practice of humility.

Especially during the shutdown, you realize how easily you can lose everything. It's meant to give you perspective of those who have less than you.

The lack of food and water. The constant exhaustion and inability to focus properly at times. It's not to the same extent as what some go through, but it gives you pause.

It gives me pause because I am one event from destitute, one job loss from penniless, one step from the bottom.

It's closer than most people realize until this pandemic happened.

The pandemic demonstrated to everyone how easy we can lose everything familiar.

If you don't keep regular contact with people, you have a difficult time keeping contact with people. And you may not know if that person is sick or worse, dead.

It's humility when you realize that you are entitled to nothing. It's humility when you accept that the person you see the most often and the person you see on tv and the person you see in your neighborhood may not be there tomorrow. It's humility that nearly everything you've done is due events aligning perfectly for you to succeed.

Anything and everything can and will be taken away from us. Food, water, our safety. If anything, the pandemic has systematically shown us where our society is weak and unequal. Our way of life has been easily uprooted.

But there is no reason for despair.

There is always hope.

And that's what the last 10 days of Ramadan teaches us.

May 14, 2020 - May 23, 2020

The Last 10 days are the most spiritual of the entire month.

Some spend the entire 10 days in a state of mediation. They spend the 10 days & nights in a room or in a mosque praying and meditating.

The last 10 nights provide hope. Not only that god can fix our situations, but will give us the strength to fix it ourselves and to survive troubled times. We gain the strength to stay hopeful and continue to move forward.

In a religious sense, the last 10 nights are for repentance and turning back to god. Each action is towards spiritual enlightenment and for a good afterlife. The 10 days a person spends in meditation brings them closer to god and gives them the strength to break bad habits and build good ones.

Many people ask me what's the point? If everything someone does during Ramadan, they won't see or know if it actually helps them then what's the point?

Ramadan builds the faith of a Muslim. Though we probably will never know the outcome of our prayers until we die, Ramadan is a good practice for building habits.

For example, if you're trying to quit smoking, Ramadan provides a person with a test to break their habit. They have 30 days to try to break and even if they can stop for just one day, it shows that they have the power within themselves that they can break the bad habit.

Ramadan is a spiritual month for both practicing and non-practicing Muslims.

It gives us hope. And that's something desperately needed in this pandemic.

We can't give into despair because if it's anything that Ramadan teaches us, it's to not give up hope. You can improve yourself and your situation no matter what. You just need to take a step in the right direction.

It's that initial step that can put people on a healthier path to a better life.

May 24, 2020 - Ramadan 2021 (April 14, 2021? Depends on lunar sightings)

Eid al-Fitr is the celebration after the last day of fasting. The day of Eid is determined by the sighting of the crescent moon. It's always under lots of debate. This year its either Saturday May 23 or Sunday May 24.

Usually for celebration, people give zakat (charity) to anyone in need. Kids receive money, families donate money to each other, more donations to anyone and everyone. If you can't give money, you give back in other ways through volunteering and helping others.

The reason for celebration and what makes Ramadan special is that it was the month the Quran, the holy book of Islam, was first revealed.

The celebration of Eid al-Fitr is to remember the loyalty of Ibrahim (Abraham) when God asked Ibrahim to sacrifice his son. The entire month of Ramadan, all Muslims obeyed God and refrained from food, water, and other worldly pleasures.

This Eid was interesting. Typically, everyone goes to a mosque to pray the final prayer that marks the end of Ramadan and lots of hugs and handshakes follow. That didn't happen. People prayed at home with their families, and my family went about the day as usual.

The day didn't change. But people have.

People change after Ramadan and hope to keep up the good habits. It's like making a New Year's resolution but Ramadan forces you to try it for 1 month to prove to yourself that it can be done. People change and hope to be better than they were before Ramadan.

Patience is a lacking virtue in today's instant oatmeal world. It's hard to be patient when you're used to 100 mbps internet and prime shipping. Or even watching shows and movies on demand.

Ramadan teaches us patience. It forces us to be patient. Forces us to slow down. Slow down and think about what you've lost and what you can easily lose.

How you do something is how you do everything. One of the ways to build patience is to do things more slowly. Speaking slowly forces you to focus on word choice. Driving 5 mph below the speed limit protects you and others, and gives you a chance to look at the world around you.

The pandemic forced everyone to slow down, and everyone has felt it, but it's most noticeable in the U.S.

The U.S is a nation with the go-getter attitude engrained from our school-years. We feel if we're not doing anything, we're lazy or unproductive. But many don't realize or internalize that busy does not equal productive. Plenty of people work less than 8 hours a day, but are extremely productive. Now, it's not entirely do to having patience, but patience does play a role.

Patience plays a role in change. Growing as person requires patience. Breaking a bad habit requires patience. Building a good habit requires patience. Growing a career requires patience. Self-control requires patience.

Ramadan is a good experience in patience. For those trying to break/build habits in Ramadan, they learn the patience.

The world may be going to crap, but you're still here. Which means you can still make a difference.

Change occurs in **excruciating** small steps, but it will still occur. This requires patience.

Voting in November may or may not will fix everything. When they vote in a new president and don't see any change within a few months, they'll lose hope.

We cannot fall into this trap. We might not see the change instantly, but we've stepped in the right direction.

For Gen Z, this pandemic has been our traumatic event. From this event, we will move forward with renewed vigor to right the inequalities. This is our make or break moment. Either we'll be last generation of humans to live in a normal world or we'll be the generation to create the most revolutionary shift in the status quo since the Magna Carta.

I reminded of a quote from *The West Wing*, a show that easily creates a hopeful sense in the viewer regardless of political affiliation.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful and committed citizens can change the world.

Do you know why? It's the only thing that ever has.”

- The West Wing