

WISDOMTOOTH

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A different Ramadan

Every year, particularly for Muslims, the countdown to Eid in the month of Ramadan is largely that — the Eid day! Do not get me wrong, there is nothing wrong about the anticipation or the celebration. But I personally feel that most of us lose sight of the main purpose of the month, and engage in activities that perhaps cheapen the spirit in many ways. The purpose of Eid-ul-Fitr is to celebrate the joys of having had the opportunity of doing good deeds in the blessed month of Ramadan. Which means that doing the good deeds is what warrants a celebration. But in reality, for countless people, the day of Eid and the countless social frivolities continuing well into the next month, appear to take precedence over the actual observance of the month of fasting.

Ramadan is about practice; of living a life in a manner that is pleasing to Allah, with personal improvements, health, as well as the added benefits of developing and acting on compassion for the less fortunate, through increasing charity and socially impactful actions. I feel, many of us need to re-evaluate our ways of life during this time, and reflect on our actions in the past, with the intent to identify whatever possible mistakes, and use the blessed month to rectify those mistakes and form new and better habits.

The first and most obvious action related to Ramadan is the ritual of fasting — abstaining from food and drink from dawn to dusk. It seems like a simple enough thing to do, but how many of us have actually thought about the purpose behind this? To me, it is a reminder to count the everyday

blessings we take for granted; we start our fast with full bellies, while being assured of having a full table at sundown as well. But millions of people around the world do not have the access to the basic human right of three full meals a day, and many of them live not far away at all. Perhaps, this Ramadan, we could be more thoughtful about it.

Shorobor is an organisation that has an iftar package programme. You can buy a package to donate a full month's iftars for one person for just Tk 660 this year.

Or, you can provide help with the month's rations for a family that you know is struggling.

As citizens living in a country full of people living on the margins of poverty and without any food security, I feel Ramadan is a time to remember that consciously, be thankful and share that good fortune

as much as we can. From this perspective, the gluttony-inducing glitzy sehri parties, and buffets seem offensive. I went to one such iftar with friends once. The company and camaraderie were a lot of fun honestly, but the wastage and amounts of food was obnoxiously offensive, and I felt indecent for participating. Having said that, community bonds are important, and should be fostered. Eating together enables better bonding. Perhaps, the correct way for us then is to consciously temper the activities with moderation.

Another aspect of Ramadan, again in anticipation of the Eid celebrations, is shopping. Universally, on festival days, people want to dress and look their best, and decorate their homes the same way. There is joy in looking and feeling presentable, and seeing the happy faces of loved ones looking all pretty. But somewhere along the line, many of us have lost the simplicity from this aspect, and made it into a convoluted debacle of display and unmitigated consumerist greed. I only point to those who buy festive clothes in the double digits — how can buying 15 saris or 12 kurtis for one person be justified, especially since we also buy things all year round?

Once again, moderation is all I advocate, for our moral soundness, for financial conservatism, and also, to minimising our individual carbon footprints.

Most of us are blessed with closets full of stuff, be it clothes or jewellery or shoes. Perhaps this Ramadan, when we shop, a simple rule could help us be more socially impactful. If we have the means, for every

outfit we get ourselves, let us get one of good quality for someone who could not do it for themselves. The rule could apply to practically everything we get, too.

Anonymous cash gifts can also be wonderful for struggling families.

For the near future, it seems that a majority of people will be staying at home a lot, due to the spread of Covid-19. Normal life will take a long time to resume, and for the foreseeable future, many of us will be largely bound at home, even after the first wave of viral contamination ends. Staying together longer also creates friction. Ramadan is a time to practice patience, and kindness. Hunger and abstinence affect people in various ways, but mood swings and irritability are most common. This Ramadan, let us be more mindful of each other's mental health, from the stress, collective trauma, and disrupted daily lives.

The Covid-19 crisis has caused millions in economic losses. Keeping aside the effects of lower productions on the environment, in the immediate aftermath, thousands of livelihoods have been lost, savings wiped out, small businessmen and companies gone bankrupt, and the struggles of the people are not going to end anytime soon. We must all be more conscientious, spend responsibly, share our good fortunes, support local producers and sellers, and do our utmost.

This Ramadan, we have to be extra resilient, to help ourselves and people around us battle this crisis, with charity and kindness, and even more kindness.

Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

LS REMINDER

Everyday hygiene

From our very childhood, we are taught about the dos and don'ts of personal hygiene and public etiquette. Such practices include daily activities like putting on fresh clothes, not spitting, and littering. However, as we get older, and perhaps a little busier with our lives, these etiquettes go overlooked. These might seem trivial, but in reality, and more importantly, in the current climate, could be a matter of life-and-death.

CLEANLINESS IS GODLINESS

Cleanliness is preached to us from a very young age. Yet, at some point we have all disassociated ourselves from its practices. Unless we know how to keep ourselves tidy, we cannot but only wish to do so for the collective community. It starts with the self; it starts with hand-washing.

It may be difficult to believe but there are times when we forget to wash our hands properly,

leaving behind germs and dirt particles. Unless one can refrain from touching their faces, these particles have the potential to damage the body's respiratory system and overall immunity. It is safe to agree that taking a few extra seconds to properly wash hands is better than having to deal with health complications later.

For those who question their hand washing skills, a number of videos are available online to break down the process.

DENTAL CARE

Dental care cannot be ignored. Even while sitting at home with no intention of getting out of our pyjamas, we do not want to invite gum disease, cavities, or foul breath.

Firstly, the toothbrush itself should be changed every three months. A worn-out toothbrush is less likely to get into all the nooks and crannies to remove all leftover particles.

Secondly, the toothpaste. This depends on personal preference, but use one which contains fluoride. Remember to floss, and lastly, one final rinse using mouthwash.

HANDKERCHIEFS AND NAPKINS

It goes without saying, sneezing, coughing and spitting openly are habits no one appreciates.



These practices of flagrant throat and nasal clearing come off as

moderately inconsiderate and iniquitous to everyone else. Putting an end to this norm is a necessity.

Other than being a distasteful practice, doing so allows germs to transition from one person to another, spreading vastly. Essentially, when one openly coughs or sneezes, tiny droplets are released into the air which may contain germs and viruses.

To combat this objectionable habit, carrying a handkerchief or paper napkin at all times is not a breach of peace. Instead of germs floating freely, sneezing or coughing into a handkerchief is safer. Covering one's mouth with their elbow will also serve the purpose. In a scenario where one cannot help themselves, it would be best to avoid crowds and large gatherings.

By Puja Sarkar

Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

THE ETIQUETTE OF PERSONAL SPACE

Be it within the home walls or out in public, it is necessary to maintain a physical distance with the people around. Some people just might not appreciate standing in close contact. Unwanted physical contact, constant questioning, going through their belongings or emails etc. also include invading personal space. It hampers workspace and family relationships especially, when everyone is stuck in a confined area for a very long time.

The same can be said while staying indoors. Just because it is family members does not mean they will enjoy someone else's company all the time. With that being said, even family members need their personal space and privacy to be in their best health.

In today's time and age, cleanliness and hygiene, along with public etiquette has become overshadowed by ignorance and unawareness. Yet, these practices are needed now more than ever not only to maintain social and environmental health, but also to protect ourselves from life-threatening diseases. These practises help internalise habits of sanitation and mental strength which could ultimately shield the entirety of mankind.