

How We Do Ramadan Wrong

MAHA ATAF KHAIR

It's that time of the year again, when we're supposed to be the best versions of ourselves. But despite the best of intentions there are certain behaviours that are all too common, and yet, go against the very spirit of Ramadan.

1) Do you yell at rickshaw pullers, drivers, domestic workers and such?

Ramadan dictates we control our anger, yet the all too common sight in the city is people yelling at their servers. It's reasonable to be frustrated over not getting your money's worth. But it's also rather unreasonable to yell (and often swear) when you can just as easily put across the same message through simple explanation. And maybe, when you're civil, the server might actually take you seriously and not get defensive? Earn *sawab* this Ramadan by not yelling at people!

2) Do you talk about people behind their backs?

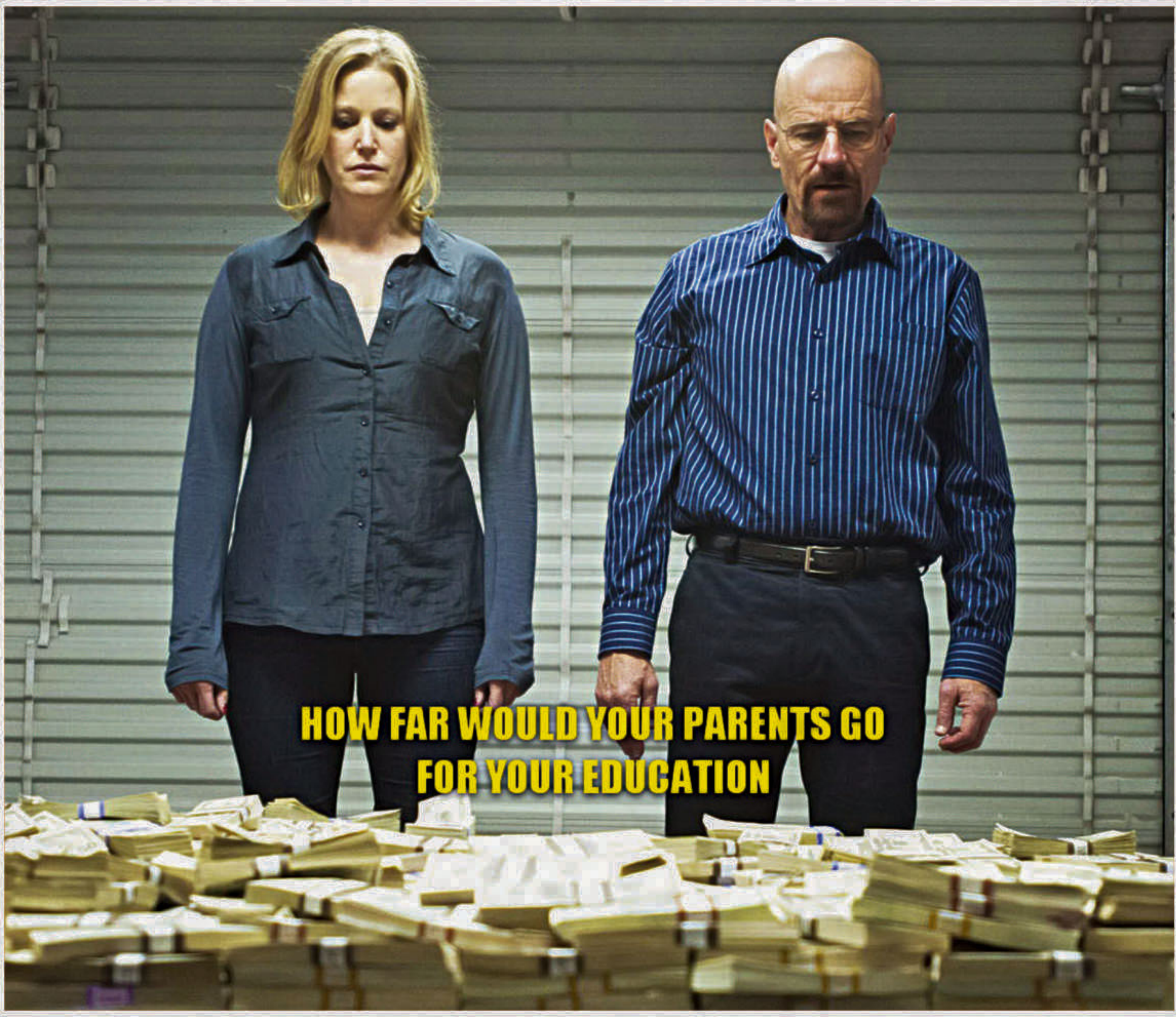
Maybe this is something that you do all throughout the year, and old habits die hard, but Ramadan is about self-improvement, which means no lying, no swearing, and definitely no talking about people behind their backs. Go talk to your friend if you're upset with them, rather than talking to everyone else about it instead.

3) Do you shop all day, every day?

This is more or less for the ones who want to make the best of the shopping deals offered this month. A little shopping once in a while is necessary, but spending the whole day at malls and shops is not. Ramadan is a time to practice abstinence. Shopping all day is a form of self-indulgence. You're not abstaining by indulging – simple logic.

4) Do you judge other people for eating while you're fasting?

Can we all make a pact not to do this, please? Our decision to fast is ours. Ramadan is about developing the capability to control our selves around food. Just because we choose to fast, doesn't mean other people cannot eat either. The whole point of this month is to develop self control, and if you don't have much of it – that's really saying something about you.



How much does your EDUCATION cost?

MUHAMMAD MUHTASIM JAWAD
 A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY STUDENT

The Finance Minister has proposed a 10 percent tax on private educational institutes in the National Budget for the upcoming fiscal year. While this was done to alleviate the budget deficit, you may easily guess what this means for students and their families.

Private universities are considered “non-profit” organisations. Is it justified to impose any sort of VAT on them? Leaders of APUB (Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh) are baffled by these conflicting messages from the government. These institutes hardly get facilities from the government. Moreover, the lack of seats in the public universities is what causes many to enrol in private universities in the first place.

This decision to levy taxes on the private education sector will hit the middle-class families of the country pretty hard. The rising tuition fees already deter many students from pursuing higher education in private universities. On top of that, the added tax would cause many families to avoid sending their children to these institutes.

“After completing my O/A Levels, I had planned to apply in a private university but my parents are completely against the notion,” says Samia Mallick. “According to them, the expenses would be skyrocketing soon. They are not even allowing me to sit for the admission tests.”

According to the UGC, there are 85 private universities and 64 private medical institutes where about 5 lakh students are enrolled. In 2010, when the government had proposed a tax of 4.5 percent, students participated in demonstrations in the capital – forcing them to rescind the decision. However, on the onset of the recent decision, disapproval and anger will definitely spark among the student community.

Nusaiba Mirza, a student of NSU, says, “Higher tuition fees mean it gets harder on my parents if I take a lot of courses together in one semester. I'll have to take fewer classes per semester, so it might take me longer to graduate. I can't possibly go for a

dual-major now, either.” Those sentiments are shared by many other students. Tuition fees in private universities range from around BDT 40,000 to 80,000 per semester/trimester for a student on an average, depending on the number of credits. The recent proposal would certainly hike the overall cost of education by a large amount. The duration for graduation may become prolonged for many, and some may decide to entirely discontinue their undergraduate programme.

“I think it was an unwise move. The cost of private education is already beyond the reach of many,” says Monzu Naznin, a lawyer and a mother of two sons studying in a leading private university. “This means that students have to pursue more part-time jobs alongside studies, while parents must strive to earn more.” Many university students already juggle classes and part-time jobs. The study-work balance is most likely to see some tipping of the scales in the near future.

This move might also be perceived as discriminatory. Students who do not get admission at public universities would be presented with only two choices: studying at costly private institutes or studying abroad which is even more expensive. An enraged parent, Sirazul Islam, says, “This is absurd. Why should private universities pay VAT while public universities remain free of any such expenses? Why can't the government arrange more public university seats before causing such inconvenience to the citizens of our country? Will reducing the price of tobacco help our students?”

Instead of a reduction in expenses, the general public will now struggle to cope up with the rising costs of quality education. Bangladesh cannot prosper if the road to higher education is blocked by monetary constraints. The student community of Bangladesh desperately urges the government to reconsider this decision.

Muhammad Muhtasim Jawad is your next-door superman and he needs you to get him his cape. Your curtain will work too. Shout at him on facebook.com/jawad.muhtasim or jawad.mmjr@gmail.com