

Catching a break shouldn't be this hard



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Being a full-time student at a university is vastly different from being in high school. A degree's sheer workload can leave you working till midnight and still behind schedule.

TAASEEN MOHAMMED ISLAM

There are times in life when you just need to sit down, take a break, and have a KitKat. Whether it be overwhelming work pressure or academic deadlines, being laser-focused for too long can prove counterproductive, and breaks can be a healthy way of coping with stress. However, as surprising as it may be, the older you get, the harder it is to slow down and relax for a bit.

Contrary to school, where even a mildly warm temperature warranted a week off, the reality is vastly different when you are in university or working. Being a university student or a young professional can mean you're expected to "hustle and grind", too often at the risk of your health and well-being.

There have been times in university when I've been very sick but still forced myself to attend classes, simply given that I would not be able to catch up with the academics I'd have missed if I had taken the break. Similarly, many friends of mine in the earlier stages of their careers not only have to sacrifice their health and well-being to show up but also spend considerable amounts of their free time

occupied with work.

So this begs the question, why is it so hard to catch a break these days? The first thing to acknowledge is young adulthood and the host of new responsibilities that *adulthood* comes with. Growing up can result in a negative work-life balance being formed, simply because it involves a difficult adjustment process to hectic schedules.

Being a full-time student at a university is vastly different from being in high school. A degree's sheer workload can leave you working till midnight and still behind schedule. Similarly, between getting ready and commuting back and forth, 9 to 5 jobs essentially take up a person's entire day, leaving them just enough time to get to bed and ultimately spend a couple of hours scrolling on their devices in an attempt to gain back some of the time from the day they have just lost.

As if the pressures of growing up weren't enough, the rise of social media, especially LinkedIn, filled with family members, friends, and acquaintances curating and parading their achievements only worsens things. While

it should be understood that social media is a curated collection of people's very best, the sheer number of accomplishments others have on display can sound alarm bells internally and trigger panic and anxiety about falling behind.

This, in turn, disincentives us from taking a break and working on ourselves, which further leads people towards a burnout. There is also a deeply twisted but prevalent glamorisation of being overworked, aided by social media. Numerous people pride themselves on working overtime, wasting away at night studying or working, or working themselves so hard that they miss out on time with their friends or even give up longstanding hobbies just to get ahead.

Ultimately, it all boils down to us living in a very competitive world. Whether at school, university, or your job, life has unfortunately evolved into a fight for the survival of the fittest, with everyone grasping at whatever opportunity comes their way.

This, in turn, disincentives us from taking a break and working on ourselves, which further leads people towards a burnout. There is also a deeply twisted but prevalent glamorisation of being overworked, aided by social media.

Culturally, this part of the world often holds one's value as directly proportional to one's talents and achievements. Thus, a large number of people grew up thinking they are seen as valuable only when they have something to show for themselves. This ultimately fuels their self-doubt and a failure to equate their self-worth with intrinsic value, resulting in a toxic cycle of being constantly consumed with productivity, like a hamster in a wheel that it cannot get off or slow down.

However, circumstances are slowly but surely changing. More people understand now that the purpose of their life isn't labour. Fewer people attribute purely hard work to their job achievements, acknowledging that other factors, such as their position in the socioeconomic hierarchy, their network, and even their luck, are also at play. Gen Z and millennials are also a lot more concerned about their well-being and work-life balance, trying to fight against hustle culture despite how hard it is.

So next time you need a break, just take it. After all, you deserve it.

Taaseen Mohammed Islam is a student at NSU.

Eid shopping remorse over consumerism

ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

Eid is the occasion for which Muslims do most of their shopping for new apparel.

Businesses launch new collections, the words "Eid discount" become ubiquitous, and online pages go haywire with constant stock updates and pre-order announcements.

Despite the offers and discounts, Eid shopping doesn't seem to get any easier on our wallets. Food prices hike up starting from the very beginning of Ramadan, and everything else follows suit. More often than not, we turn over the price tag and end up leaving that one thing that caught our eye back in its place. When we don't, it's not uncommon to feel the crushing sense of guilt that comes from buying something above our budget. Even when we stay within the predetermined budget, the feeling that the dress we got should not cost as much may still linger. These weighty feelings may be even more intense for those of us who aren't financially independent and are funded by our parents.

In this economy, consumer guilt tends to sour the happy experience that Eid shopping should be.

Wanting new clothes for Eid should not weigh on your conscience. In Islam, while it is not obligatory, it's recommended that you dress up for the occasion. If you're not religious, it's a cultural and nostalgic practise to do so. It's a nice feeling we all deserve.

With a little strategy, we can forego the guilt and keep the Eid shopping, for example, through buying outfits that we will be able to use often. Nothing causes consumer guilt as strongly as buying something with an exorbitant price tag and using it only a couple

of times. Not to say you shouldn't own one or two special pieces of clothing, but to avoid overspending, it might be a good idea to prioritise buying items that are appropriate for a range of events. Making a list of what we need in order of importance also helps. If we buy the most important things first, we are less likely to go over budget as we can simply forego the less important items in case of having to tighten the purse strings.

Another way to save some bucks is through buying from local brands and artisans. We've all seen the memes going around about Pakistani dresses and their sky-high prices. If you have some time at your disposal, getting your dress tailor-made is also an economical decision.

Eid is a celebration to conclude the holy month of Ramadan. After a month of practising self-restraint and spirituality, you don't need to feel peer pressured to buy expensive things. Completely depriving yourself is also not a great solution, so it's best to find the balance. At the end of the day, instead of overthinking the logistics, your primary focus should be to do what you must to enjoy Eid to the fullest with your loved ones.

ILLUSTRATION: AMRIN TASNIM RAFA



Experiencing spiritual guilt in Ramadan

IRINA JAHAN

Last year, I'd stayed up on the eve of Eid helping out. But, by the end of the night, the tingling excitement of the day ahead of me turned into lamenting over Ramadan having passed again. Right before *Fajr*, standing in the balcony of my room, I immersed myself in the stillness of dawn waiting to hear the call for prayer at a distant mosque as I accepted the departure.

There often seems to be a yard span distance between our expectations from ourselves and reality. I cannot remember the last time I was able to pull an all-nighter for a test the following morning and actually succeeding in that endeavor. We have all been there and perhaps orchestrated many such intricate routines for ourselves, many of which we were not able to follow through.

I should add that I do think this spiritual guilt isn't necessarily wrong. In many ways, this feeling makes me take Ramadan more seriously than I'd done back in my school days when we would get the entire month off.

The blame for such an occurrence cannot be *entirely* on us. After all, our regular schedules are often packed and punctuated by unanticipated obstacles.

When it comes to Ramadan, we build grand aspirations. While it is better than not having any plans at all, the forecasts for the month's schedules and expectations from ourselves can often be a little overambitious. Usually, by the end of it all, it leaves me with a nagging sense of inadequacy and a hint of disdain for my other daily responsibilities, which I feel have robbed me of sacred moments of spirituality.

And as if my spirituality is on a deadline every Ramadan, I am left with the guilt of not pushing myself to do more to savour the time.

I should add that I do think this spiritual guilt isn't necessarily wrong. In many ways, this feeling makes me take Ramadan more seriously than I'd done back in my school days when we would get the entire month off.

I am also learning to see that perhaps the guilt isn't necessary to begin with. At the end of the day, we all have our roles in this world. The blessed month comes and slips away quickly and all we could wish is that we could have appreciated it more. This mirrors the other blessings in our lives - ones with a limited time span which we might take for granted. Rather than seeing them as a barrier and fuel to our spiritual guilt, we could perhaps take the time to become more appreciative of all the aspects and opportunities we are presented with.

With my life becoming busier every passing year, the challenge of multitasking and beating the physical exhaustion that anchors me to my bed keeps evolving. So, this Ramadan, I will perhaps again fall short of some my goals and the guilt is most likely here to stay for some time to come. But it marks the start of me embracing the beauty of our imperfect journeys towards spirituality and looking for the sincerity in however grand or seemingly small our acts of worship may be.



ILLUSTRATION: FATIMA JAHAN ENA