

HAVE YOU EVER
WONDERED

WHY DO

MILLIONS

PURPOSELY

STARVE

THEMSELVES?

IN THE month of Ramadan, Muslims try to improve their spiritual faculties through fasting. But how can depriving yourself of food and drink help one's spiritual progress? Surely deliberate starvation is a sign of craziness, not spiritual development! Hopefully, this pamphlet will help answer some of the questions which those who are outside of Islam must be asking with regard to issues such as the annual Ramadan fast.

So who are we? We are a Turkish foundation called RUBA, which aims to introduce what we believe is the true heart of Islam. We are just starting up in London, trying to portray Islam in a new light.

RUBA is here to change the popular view of Islam and

clear up some of the misunderstandings associated with the religion. This is especially important in a multi-cultural, multi-faith country such as Britain, with a growing Muslim population; to raise awareness on some of the misconceptions related with Islam can only be to everyone's advantage.

Regarding our philosophy, although we make use of many sources, our understanding of Islam is based on the renowned work known as the Risale-i Nur by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. Thus most of the points we make are derived from his work. So let us share our thoughts on the Ramadan fast with you; hopefully it will help us all understand better why we do what we do in this particular month of the year.

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GRATITUDE TO THE TRUE SOURCE

One of the many instances of wisdom in the Ramadan fast is the opportunity for human to give gratitude to the One who really deserves it.

Although human has been given innumerable bounties, he often forgets their true source. Now if you were to dine at a restaurant, it is obvious that you are going to thank the waiter for bringing your food to the table and the chef for cooking it. But to tip the waiter and to congratulate the chef, while ignoring the One Who actually made your food possible in the first place, is to act with ingratitude, to say the least.



God has spread countless kinds of bounties over the face of the earth for humankind, in return for which He wishes human to express gratitude, which is really a very small price to pay. But while most of us are grateful for what we receive, for the most part we attribute those bounties to causes other than God. As a result, we tend to feel indebted to them in a way that they do not deserve, for they are only means whereby God's bounties are delivered to us. Material or 'natural' causes have a part to play, **but the One Who truly deserves our gratitude is the true Source of those bounties, namely God Almighty.** It is to Him that our gratitude should be directed, and Ramadan helps us to focus on this more intently than we do at other times.

However, the gratitude we are supposed to show to Him is given not because He needs it, but because we do. To thank God is to recognise that bounties come directly from Him; it is to appreciate their worth and to perceive our own need – a need that God alone can satisfy. To show gratitude to God is to recognise that while material causes play a part, they are ultimately not the giver of Bounties. To thank God, then, is to help us sever our connection to material causes and strengthen our connection to God, the Causer of all causes.

Fasting in Ramadan, then, is the key to true gratitude. For at other times of the year, most of us who are not in difficult circumstances do not realize the value of many bounties since they do not experience real hunger. Those of us whose stomachs are full do not understand the degree of bounty there is in a piece of dry bread. But when it is time to break the fast during Ramadan, the sense of taste testifies that even dry bread is a most valuable Divine bounty in the eyes of a believer. During

Ramadan, everyone, however poor or wealthy, expresses a sort of gratitude through simply understanding the value of those bounties.

Furthermore, since eating is prohibited during the day, those fasting will say: **"These bounties do not belong to me. I am not free to eat them, for they belong to another and they are His gift to give. I will wait for His command before I touch them."** In this way, those fasting will recognize the bounty as bounty and so will be giving thanks. Thus, fasting in this way is in many respects like a key to gratitude, and gratitude is one of human's fundamental duties.



HUNGER AND COMPASSION

Another of the many instances of wisdom in fasting from the point of view of humankind's social life is as follows.

Human beings have been created differently with regard to their livelihoods. As a consequence of this difference, God Almighty invites the rich to assist the poor, so that through the hunger experienced in fasting, the rich can truly understand the pains and hunger which the poor suffer. If there were no fasting, there would be many self-indulgent rich people unable to perceive just how hard it is to be poor and hungry, and just how in need of compassion the poor and the hungry really are.

Compassion for one's fellow man is an essential of true thankfulness. Whoever you are, there will always be someone poorer than you in some respect. As human beings, we are enjoined to be compassionate towards those less fortunate than ourselves. **If we never know how hunger feels, how are we able to have true compassion for those who are always hungry? By allowing us to feel real hunger, Ramadan also gives us the opportunity to understand the plight of those worse off than ourselves, and in so doing, develop our sense of empathy and compassion.**

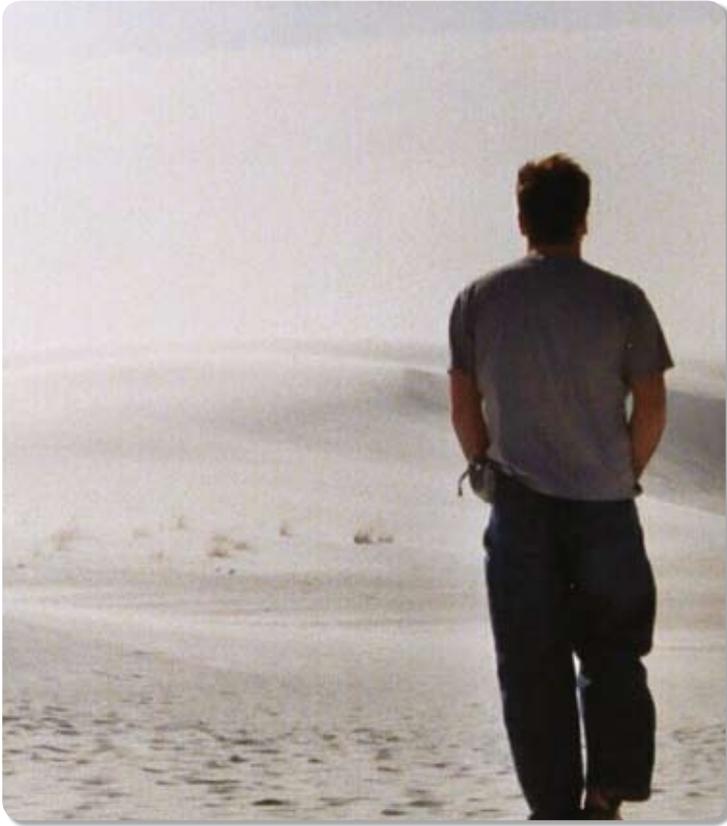
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TRUE DUTY

Another instance of wisdom in the Ramadan fast concerns the opportunity it provides for man to curb his baser tendencies.

Human's instinctual soul – the part of his being which looks to self-gratification rather than spiritual enlightenment - wants to be free and independent, and considers itself to be autonomous. According to the dictates of its nature, it even imagines it has the power to act as it pleases. It does not want to admit that it is being sustained and trained through innumerable bounties. Especially if it possesses wealth and power in this world, and if ignorance also encourages it, it will devour God's bounties like a thieving animal.

Thus during Ramadan, the instinctual soul of everyone who fasts, from the richest to the poorest, may understand that it does not own itself, but that is totally owned; it may understand that it is not free, but



that it is in servitude. **During the fast, it will come to understand that unless it is commanded, it is unable to do the simplest of things, for until it is given permission, it cannot even stretch out its hand towards water. Its imaginary power is therefore shattered and instead of worshipping itself, it begins to worship its True Source and begins to express gratitude, which is its true duty.**

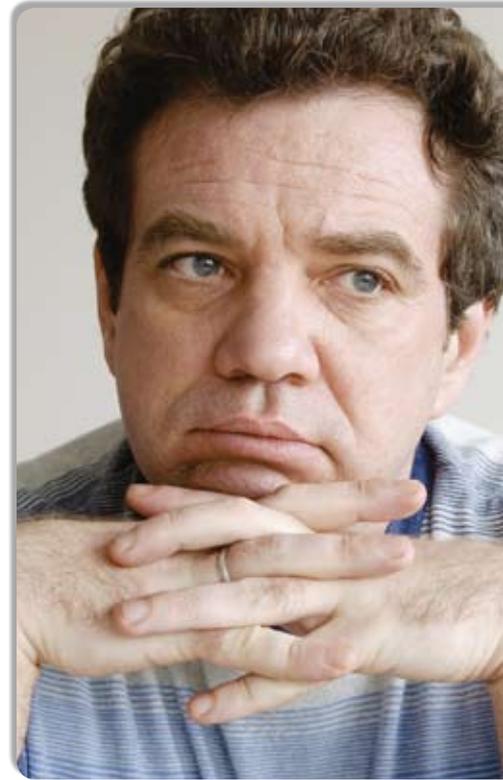
AWAKENING FROM NEGLIGENCE

Another of the many instances of wisdom in the Ramadan fast concerns the training of the instinctual soul and the abandonment of harmful and rebellious habits.

The human soul tends to forgets its true nature most easily. Prone to negligence, it either will not or cannot see the utter powerlessness, want and deficiency within itself; indeed, it would prefer never to see them. It refuses to consider just how weak it is, and how subject to transience and to disasters; it wishes to forget that it consists merely of flesh and bones, which quickly decline and eventually go to nothing.

Instead, it takes on the world as though it possessed a body made of steel, imagining itself to be undying and eternal. It hurls itself onto the world with intense greed and rapaciousness, captivated by anything that gives its pleasure or that benefits it. Furthermore, it forgets the Creator Who sustains it with perfect compassion, and it does not think of the results of its life and its life in the hereafter. Indeed, it wallows in misconduct and dissipation.

However, fasting in the month of Ramadan awakens even the most mindless and ignorant to their weakness, impotence and need. Hunger makes them think of their stomachs, thus helping them to realise how needy they are. They realize how unsound their weak bodies really are, and how much they stand in need of kindness and compassion. The soul, which is like a small Pharaoh in its tyranny, gradually comes to realise that it has no real power of its own at all. Gradually, through realising their utter impotence, the arrogant become less so, and perceive a desire to take refuge in God Almighty. And so, if ignorance has not already destroyed their hearts, they knock at the door of mercy with the hands of thankfulness.



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DISCIPLINE OF LIFE

Another

of the many instances of wisdom in fasting is this: the month of Ramadan is a kind of physical and spiritual therapy of the most important kind. When people eat and drink with no restriction, it is harmful from a medical point of view; and when they hurl themselves on everything they encounter without considering whether it is detrimental or not, it is harmful from the spiritual perspective. It is difficult for such souls to obey the spirit and the conscience. They think that they are in control, but in fact their instinctual souls have taken the reins and are riding them wherever they please. **The Ramadan fast provides human with a kind of physical and spiritual diet – one directed at disciplining the instinctual soul and training it to listen rather than to dictate.**

When we fast, we are not attracting illness to our poor, weak stomachs by cramming them with food before the previous consignment has been digested. And by abandoning even daily actions like eating, as it is commanded, we acquire the ability to listen to the commands of the reason and the Divine Law, thereby avoiding wrong actions which may harm us spiritually.

Furthermore, millions of people frequently suffer from hunger. Enforced hunger, therefore, and the discipline which goes with it, are needed in order to develop our patience and endurance. Fasting in Ramadan is the patient endurance of a period of hunger and thirst that continues for an average of sixteen hours – more if the pre-dawn meal is not eaten - and it is a discipline and form or training. That is to say, fasting is also a cure for impatience and lack of endurance, which tend to double people's afflictions.

The Ramadan fast provides human with a kind of physical and spiritual diet – one directed at disciplining the instinctual soul and training it to listen rather than to dictate.

Moreover, the stomach is like a factory that has many workers. And many of the human organs are connected to it. If we do not allow ourselves a rest from activity during the day for a month, we makes the factory's workers and those organs forget their particular duties. We make them busy with our needs so that they remain under our tyranny. Also, we confuse the rest of the organs in the human body with the rumbling

and steam of the factory's machinery. We continuously attract their attention to our needs, making them temporarily forget their own exalted duties. **It is because of this that for centuries those closest to God have accustomed themselves to discipline and to eating and drinking little in order to achieve spiritual enlightenment and perfection.** To give the workers in the factory of the stomach a much-needed rest during this month is to allow them to carry out their own duties of worship. The stomach, together with our other organs, has not been created solely for our own benefit and gratification, and the Ramadan fast not only allows our organs to carry out their natural God-given duties but it also helps us to understand that our bodies do not answer to us alone, and that they too are engaged in the worship of God.



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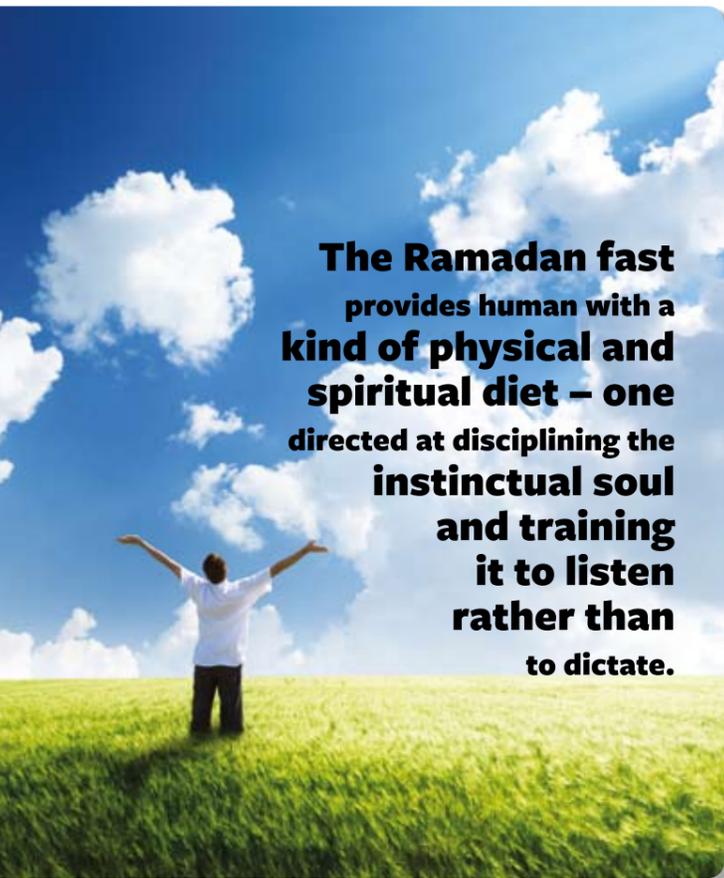


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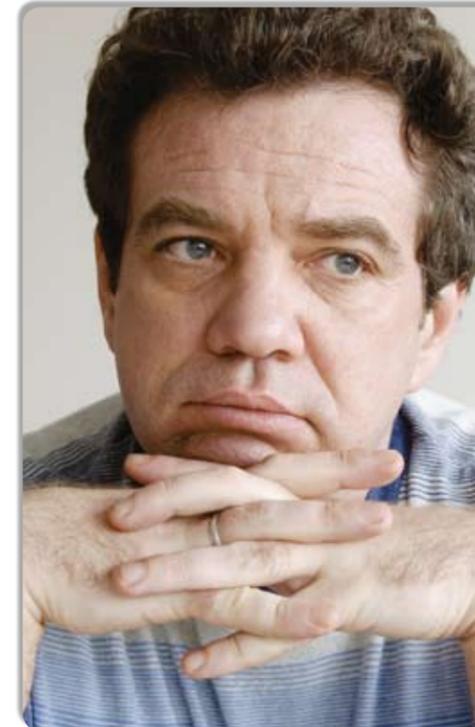
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