Silent, scary, is the arriving
Of a germ that is hiding
In the breast of us unaware
Of its influence we’d rather not share

The month has dawned upon us
With its many gifts and gems
To force us to look within ourselves
So that perhaps we’d make amends

Oblivious to the first and primary Cause
So consumed, all we hear is Corona
Will we wake up to take heed
With Ramadhan just around the corner

A month full of Prophetic breezes
In which our desires are taken to the hammer
Strap up and overcome our lower selves
"in order that we attain Taqwa" (God-consciousness)

Maybe away from home or far from loved ones
We are told with much effect ‘don’t go outside’
Let’s prepare to welcome this blessed month
And instead let us go inside.

I pray this reaches you all in the best of faith and health.

With the blessed month of Ramadhan just around the corner, we’d like to take this opportunity to offer some advice to help us not only to take advantage of the many fruits availed to us at this special time of year, but also some practical tips on coping with fasting and worship in Ramadhan whilst the majority of us are staying at home.

Our current circumstances with the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic present many challenges such as working remotely, being away from loved ones in the case of those students away from home, not being able to go outside and having children/dependents at home with us. But we must remember that “in the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity.”

The old adage “if you fail to prepare, prepare to fail” rings particularly true in our current circumstance at all levels. The following advice revolves around the central theme of maintaining a routine and time management whilst staying at home.
Students
Ramadhan, whilst being a month of sacrifice in the way of food, drink and internal restraint, being successful in maintaining a balanced approach to dealing with all our responsibilities and studies whilst also having appropriate downtime is rarely achieved without a schedule.

In the next few days, take some time to jot down a realistic and practical schedule of your week and weekend days. Perhaps start by noting down the times of the daily prayers and then fill in time before and after for study, prayer, exercise and relaxing.

Colleagues who have children at home or other caring responsibilities
With schools being closed many of us now have children at home whilst also work remotely. Children naturally need attention, help with their education and to be fed from time to time.

Schedule your child/ren’s day with creative and challenging activities at home. Home schooling resources are in abundance online with hundreds of educational and wholesome ways to engage our children at home. Take a look at our working remotely hub that contains links and resources for parents and carers.

Avoid trying to bring ‘school’ home and thinking that they need the same 9am-3pm routine. Your immediate and direct attention means that ‘less is more’ and the quality moments you can spend with your children in constructive and fun activities will keep everyone happy.

Away from loved ones and the mosque
The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said

“The entire earth has been made a place of prayer” (Sunan al-Tirmidhi)

It would be hard to disagree that we are living in unprecedented times with the impact coronavirus (Covid-19) has had upon our function, interaction and existence in the world but also from a technologically perspective. Now more than ever, we can connect seamlessly with our friends and family, communicate ideas and emotions and have access to almost limitless beneficial online content.

Ramadhan for Muslims, like much of the Islamic faith, is very much a social and communal experience and not being able to break fast, pray or simply come together when ordinarily the mosques would be full of men, women and children seeking closeness to the Divine, will no doubt leave many of us feeling lonely, removed and sad.

Work hard towards remaining connected to the rhythms of Ramadhan, by adhering to a realistic daily schedule, allocate appropriate spaced times for reciting and reflecting upon the Qur’an, dedicate a physical space or area of worship (musallah) to make beautiful in your homes, perhaps set up online video calls with friends or family to read and reflect upon the teachings of Islam together. Many mosques and Islamic institutes now provide hundreds of free online courses. If you are fortunate enough to be locked down at home with family, institute communal prayers (Jamma’) with your family members bring the feeling of communal worship back home.

Many of us, despite staying at home, live deeply privileged lives, let’s not take this for granted.
Consider volunteering time (through online engagement) or donating towards institutions, helping all those who are not able to work from home, who maybe working in the NHS, working with the elderly and vulnerable in your locality.

Online resources include:
- https://seekersguidance.org/
- https://yaqeeninstitute.org/

Iftar food planning and preparation

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said

“The food of one person is enough for two, the food of two is enough for four, and the food of four is enough for eight.” (Muslim)

- The above is encouragement to be sympathetic with food, that even a little food is enough to suffice, and there is blessing in sharing with those present.
- As mentioned before, the demands of Ramadhan naturally affect not only our choices of the food we eat but also how and when food is obtained.
- With restrictions on how often we should be leaving our homes, it would be best to once again devise a schedule of Iftar meals for the month of Ramadhan.
- With the main (Iftar) meal being in the late evening and the morning Suhoor meal taking place in the early hours, try to ensure that you have sufficient, wholesome and varied foods before Ramadhan begins.
- Meal plans set ahead of time for each day will help you purchase and stock food adequately, without the constant need to ‘pop out’ every time you forget something.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said

“No man fills a container worse than his stomach. A few morsels that keep his back upright are sufficient for him. If he has to, then he should keep one-third for food, one-third for drink and one-third for his breathing.” (Imam Ahmad and al-Tirmidhi)

- Ramadhan is also a time when we think we can eat more than we actually can and we definitely will find 'our eyes being bigger than our stomach'. Resist the temptation to purchase and consume excess amounts of food during Iftar, which will inevitably lead to waste.
- Share your meals with the people you reside with or consider making food for others.

Physical wellbeing and mental health

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said

“You will not be given anything after the word of sincere faith like wellness, so ask God for wellness.” (Ahmad)

Being at home, feeling isolated, surrounded by the humdrum of being locked down or even being consumed by the often negative and fatal effects of coronavirus (Covid-19), affects our physical and mental health in ways we cannot imagine.
Counter intuitively, most people are actually much more alert and aware whilst fasting and whilst we may psychologically think that we should limit our physical activity as we have limited our food intake, physical exercise is critically important to maintaining bodily vitality, refreshment of the mind and overall wellbeing.

Schedule a small yet consistent physical workout you can manage, preferably at the same time each day (I personally find 20mins a day, 45mins before sunset very beneficial). Simple bodyweight calisthenics or the use of simple sports equipment (resistance bands, dumbbells, swiss ball) can provide the body with sufficient protocols of exercise to work up a good sweat.

Similarly, the effects of staying at home on our mental wellbeing cannot be understated. Increasing anxiety, depression, loneliness and being away from our usual life routines and social networks will inevitably affect our minds and perceptions of self. The reality of this pandemic is that we are surrounded by death and dying and it is quite normal to feel dread, have feelings of fear and heightened stressed levels.

Please seek out the many Muslim mental health organisations in UK who have united to provide a range of services to tackle mental health problems arising from the coronavirus pandemic.

Each organisation specialises in an aspect of mental health. Please share with those who may be suffering - whether anxiety, loneliness due to isolation or just want to talk – they’re here for you.

Links below:
www.myh.org.uk | www.inspiritedminds.org.uk | www.mcapn.co.uk
www.britishima.org | www.sakoon.co.uk | www.mwnhelpline.co.uk
www.mindworksuk.co.uk | www.approachableparenting.org.uk

Here you can find a guide on how to look after your mental health from the mental Health Foundation. Our Employee Wellbeing Programme provider, Confidential Care (CiC), provide independent, free and confidential information, support and advice to all colleagues and their immediate family (living in the same household), 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for both work and personal concerns. Find out more.

A deeply wise and insightful faith perspective on the current pandemic—https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAnTLLyWZVk

I pray that we all reach the blessed month of Ramadhan in safety and security.
I pray that we are all able to benefit from this time and that we use our time careful and with purpose.

I pray that all hardships, difficulties and anxieties are lifted and that we return to state of normalcy as soon as God wills.

I kindly request you for your prayers.

Take care.
Peace be upon you.

Nisar

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