

## SPIRITUAL EROSION AND THE VICISSITUDES OF FAITH

### WHY FAITH FALLS AND IS IT INEVITABLE?

Can you sense when you are experiencing spiritual erosion? If you do, consider it a sign of a healthy faith state. This article explains why by presenting four major illnesses that can diminish your faith. The highly sincere, deeply concerned and remarkably informed arguments discuss why faith falls in a candid and lighthearted style that is hope inspiring.

By Amer Haleem



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# RAA – Ramadhan AVOIDERS Anonymous

BY SOBIA ASRAR

Holidays come in two shades: the inane, just-have-fun holidays like the April Fools' and New Year's days; and relatively significant holidays, like Mother's Day and Thanksgiving Day.



For Muslims, our holidays of Eid fall in the latter category, because they are days of celebration that cap periods of intense worship. Historically, holidays, which is traced to 'holy days', used to be days taken off from work to focus on spiritual and religious activities. So, could Ramadhan also not be considered a holiday?

Well, we would not quite use that word to describe it. We all know Ramadhan is no holiday. And it is not just because its days are spent in fasting and its nights in salah offering and masjid going. It is the fact that it is that for a whole month.

So, while every other holiday requires

of us a rare gift for mom or hosting a onetime fabulous turkey feast, and helps us in feeling atoned till next year, Ramadhan offers no shortcut to salvation. It is 29 or 30 days, take it or leave it.

But, it is not just about the perks involved with short holidays that make it easier to commemorate than a 30-day one. It is not because the spirit only lasts for a brief time or that shorter events are easier to plan. It is because it is easier to dress up in a disguise for a while than to actually stay like that for a month.

That explains why Ramadhan often reminds me of addiction. Throughout

our lives, we follow patterns of alternately destructive and tolerable behavior. But when the destructive part overpowers us, it takes a jarring moment or an intensive rehabilitation program to wean us off of the habit we have formed. And until that happens, addictions either go unnoticed or are deliberately overlooked.

So, how exactly do Ramadhan and addiction tie together again? The truth is, though we may never like to characterize ourselves as having fallen victim to a disorder as damaging as addiction, we are actually so attached to our worldly activities that we have a hard time letting go of them. Within us reside a love toward, and ties to, them which, if unbound, would make us feel empty; it is the addiction to our lives that has made it so difficult for many of us to embrace Ramadhan as we do any other special occasion.

Nobody will admit to feeling apprehension as Ramadhan nears, of drawing back from their normal routines, not for a one-day holiday hiatus, but a month. And, come Eid day, even if they do manage to pull off a remarkable 180 just for Ramadhan, they are back at it once more, even if they know they shouldn't be.

And such are symptoms of addiction: not admitting one's susceptibility to it or acknowledging one's dependence, as well as believing no real change is warranted or can be made.

IT IS REPORTED FROM THE COMPANIONS: **“Faith increases and decreases.”**

(Ibn Majah)

THE PROPHET, SALLALLAHU ALAYHE WA SALLAM, SAID: **“The best of my Community [from the Prophet’s time until the end] is the generation amid whom I have been sent—then those to come after them, then those to come after them [and Allah knows if the Prophet said this a third time or not]. Then there shall appear a people who give testimony, though their testimony can be taken not, who swear divine vows but fulfill them not, who deceive and are trustworthy not. Moreover, fat shall be prevalent among them.”**

(Bukhari and Muslim)



## The Forewarning of the Prophet and the Preservation of Faith

THIS SECOND STATEMENT of the Prophet is the first hadeeth I recall reading that reached inside my soul and disturbed me. It conflicted with everything I hoped for and the way I thought things would inescapably end up. I was 23 and just married, trying to learn my religion abroad. I remember crying.

It seemed to me until then that new faith, sincere and certain, should soar up and up and never falter—not because the young Muslims I had been meeting and learning with, who were not unlike me at the time (fresh and striving), were so deserving or without fault. But because I could swear—with all our diversity, and newness, and youth—

that we had been culled by Allah Himself in a bumper harvest for the world for a special purpose: Ours, I thought, was a destined generation, sure to reinstate Islam and thus godliness among the human fellowship and to deliver a troubled world to its halcyon days.

Oh, the young Muslim men I met then and heard about from friends! One could scarcely conceive of their genius, their talent, their courage—and, above all, the profound spiritual thrust catapulting them forth, one and all, from every chasm of worldly culture, from every streaming civilizational ravine. They had broken free, it seemed to me, of all parochial orbits and bourgeois attachments. Disburdened of the worldly, they sought to ascend that steep, less traveled road. It was there that we met up.

They came from everywhere and all points in between, each one a kind of knightly figure by day and incandescent monk by night. With what admiration I beheld them. How they glimmered with humility, their faces radiant with earnestness, divine love, and authenticity! Mine was a generation that could not fail.

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**D**uring Ramadhan, the life of a Muslim can lead toward great alienation. What we have to go through with all our hunger, a long work or study day, and the extra seasonal commitments, can thoroughly exhaust us, and leave us feeling like we plain don't belong on earth.

# RAMADHAN:

## Surviving Hardship, Finding Meaning

BY RODRIGO ADAME

I am not exaggerating. For those of us for whom it is hard to remember the benefits of what we are doing during this blessed month, I do believe it is just the sheer power of our families and communities coming together (and going through hardship together) which keep us going. But for those of us here in the West who study and work among non-Muslims, there is an additional aspect to our Ramadhan fasting which may cause us personal difficulty, and that is our isolation from the rest of society.

It is true that we may be facing a desk, a sales counter, a machine, or whatever means it is from which we earn our keep, and feel that none of our colleagues understand what we are going through. Hours can pass in this sort of isolated hunger and tiredness. Our minds can even delude us with the idea that it is too much for us to handle. But "Allah never places a burden on a soul, except what it is in its capacity," [2:286] and we know that after the 30 days of Ramadhan we be alive and well, in high spirits, and, InshaAllah, have learned a thing or two. So what method am I proposing to you, my brother or sister in Islam, to help you get through the period of hardship, and emerge having found meaning every step of the way? Quite simply: Be an ant.

Besides the complexity of its living habits, and the capabilities of its body, the ant has one very clear and amazing characteristic that is apparent to anyone who has spent time observing this amazing creature—its determination. Its vigorous pursuit

of its goals, its calculated risks against bad odds, and its ability to adapt to changing conditions. These traits prompted Imam Al-Ghazali to offer, in his *Ihya*, a beautiful parable by which we may compare ourselves and something meaningful this Ramadhan:

"A human being, in his striving to distance himself from...opposite extremes [of excess and deficiency in religion] by returning to the middle, can be compared to a fly thrown into the centre of a ring heated in fire and set on earth: it will flee from the ring's heat which surrounds it, being unable to escape, will continue to run about until it comes to rest in the centre (should it die, it will die there because the centre is the furthest point from the heat-encompassing ring."



Step by step, Imam Al-Ghazali walks us through the parable. He first says, "Man's desire surrounds him just as the heat of the ring contains the ant." This "heat" means by which Allah tests us, to which of us are best in Islam [67:02]. Every single moment this is true, not just for Muslims, but for all people on earth! The ring represents the life of mankind, all too small