

ORGANIZING YOUR LIFE IN RAMADAN

As we are spiritually preparing for Ramadan, I would like to suggest the following program to help everyone – including those of us who go to work early or to school – have an enjoyable, organized, and well-spent month.

Many people think that fasting demands a tremendous amount of energy. Therefore, they convince themselves that many of their usual activities should be reduced or suspended, that many projects should be postponed until the following month. I would like to suggest here a simple schedule, as some brothers and sisters have asked me about how to organize life during this blessed month. This schedule can be applied at any time of the year as well.

1. Sleep well

When you come back from tarawih, go to bed around one hour later in order to wake up for sahur, as this was the Prophet's (peace and blessings be upon him) sunnah. Also, eat something before fajr and then, if you wish, go back to bed. In addition, try and close your eyes even for a few minutes after dhuhr and take a power nap, even for only 15 or 20 minutes, during lunchtime. This practice, which was widespread in the past, is now usually ignored. Any person who is fasting will benefit spiritually; but if one has a healthy and rested body, there can also be many other medical and physical benefits.

2. Manage your time wisely

Make a "to do" list every day. When necessary, review it and refresh your memory about scheduled meetings or classes. Put the most important things first. If it's easier for you, use a planner to keep track of everything. Even if your time estimates are only approximate, they will still help you focus on how much you can realistically expect to get done. Attack the most important projects when your personal energy is highest. For those of you who are fasting, this time may be right after you get up. At the end of the day, wrap things up and prepare for tomorrow. Review your checklist, cross off all completed items, and move any pending items to a fresh list for tomorrow.

On another note, count your hours. If you sleep for six or seven hours and work for eight hours plus the traffic – which can be, on average, one to two hours – you are left with seven to nine hours for other things. Shopping, meals, and time spent with your family take an average of four to five hours, and time spent in the mosque at night for religious lessons, 'isha', and tarawih will take a maximum of two to three hours. You can use the remaining two hours for either learning more about Islam, doing your homework, or engage in some extra business or work from your job.

3. Manage your energy wisely

Fasting, which stresses self-discipline and self-control, is designed to make you feel cooler, calmer, and more in control of your emotions. It constantly reminds you of the need for continuous abstinence and observance. Therefore, since your body stores different components of energy, it will function according to how it feels during the hours

from fajr till maghrib. While managing your time, make sure to do the most demanding jobs or activities early in the morning without exhausting yourself. Rest in between different tasks, and breathe in enough oxygen at all times. Most of the stress is caused by shallow breathing and more worry and unrest. Another way to save energy is to understand where you're losing time and then work to cut it down.

4. Make your rest the daily prayer

Prayer rests the mind, the body, and the spirit. Use your break time to pray in congregation if you can. Since many of us want to finish reading or reciting the Qur'an at least once during Ramadan, try to read a small portion – two to four pages – before or after each prayer.

5. Eat and drink well

Allah the Almighty ordered us to eat and drink between maghrib and fajr in a way that shows continuity. This is medically proven to be the best eating habit. So eat small portions every three or four hours, instead of leaving ten hours between iftar and sahur. This also applies to drinking, since the body needs to store a minimum of two litres of liquid a day.

6. Watch less TV

Unfortunately, many Muslims stay up all night or spend most of the night watching TV and movies instead of doing useful things. Ramadan is the month of the Qur'an, an intensive season of worship and spiritual elevation – not the month of entertainment and comedy shows. We all like to laugh and have fun and balance things, but if entertainment becomes the mood of this month's nights, then we are missing the whole point of fasting.

7. Complete a project

Try to set some goals at the beginning of Ramadan and work out how to achieve them by the end of the month. For instance, commit yourself to collecting a certain amount of money for your mosque, orphanage, or school by contacting your close ones and friends. If you achieve more than half of your goals, then it will be a success and encourage you to do better next year, in sha' Allah.

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