

RAMADAN FASTING

During holy Ramadan, Muslims fast for a period of 29-30 days. Ramadan is a time to practice self-restraint and self-reflection. Fasting is seen as a way to cleanse the soul and have empathy for those in the world, who are hungry and less fortunate. Although millions around the world have successfully observed the spiritual cleansing of Ramadan for more than a thousand years, some people fear that fasting over such a long period time will have detrimental effects on their health. Maulana Mohammad Ali said "The real purpose of fasting is to attain righteousness. A person who undergoes hunger and thirst, but does not behave righteously, has done nothing. If someone is told the aim and object of doing a certain duty, and he does that duty but does not attain the required aim and object, it is as if he has not done that duty." The act of fasting is meant to remind people of less fortunate and to reinforce need to be thankful to Almighty. Fasting is self-restraint. A Muslim must abstain from food and restrain from negative thoughts during fasting in the month of Ramadan. Fasting is not only beneficial for your physical well-being; it benefits your mental and spiritual health too. Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) mentioned, "Whoever fasts during the month of Ramadan and then follows it with six days of Shawwal (Syawal) will be rewarded as if he had fasted the entire year".

Abu Huraira, Sahih Al-Bukhari has narrated, "There are two pleasures for the fasting person, one at the time of breaking his fast, and the other at the time when he will meet his Lord. Then he will be pleased because of his fasting." A study carried out by scientists in the USA found that the mental focus achieved during Ramadan increases the level of brain-derived neurotrophic factor, which causes the body to produce more brain cells, thus improving brain function.

It is said that observing Ramadan enjoy a positive effect on their lipid profile, which means there is a reduction of cholesterol in the blood. Low cholesterol increases cardiovascular health, greatly reducing the risk of suffering from heart disease, a heart attack, or a stroke. By not eating throughout the day during Ramadan you'll find that your metabolism becomes more efficient, meaning amount of nutrients you absorb from food improves.

Fasting during Ramadan is fourth of the five Pillars of Islam. These pillars, or duties, form the basis of how Muslims practice their religion. According to Islam, the Pillars of Islam are, Shahada: faith in Islam religion, Salat: pray five times per day facing direction of Mecca, Zakaat: give support to the needy, Sawm: fast during Ramadan and Hajj: making pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during lifetime.

Fasting in Islam does not just consist of refraining from eating and drinking, but from every kind of selfish desire and wrong-doing. The fast is not merely of the body, but essentially that of the spirit as well. The physical fast is a symbol and outward expression of real, inner fast. Fasting is a spiritual practice to be found in all religions. The great Founders of various faiths (Buddha, Moses, Jesus, etc.) practised quite rigorous fasting as a preliminary to attain their first experience of spiritual enlightenment and communion with God. Charity and generosity is especially urged during Ramadan. We learn to give, and not to take. The deprivation of fasting makes us sympathise with suffering of others, and desirous of alleviating it; and it makes us remember blessings of life which we normally take for granted.

Vinod Chandrashekhar Dixit

OFF 'D' CUFF

A majority of people live an ordinary life. A few people, however, make it extraordinary by giving it a beautiful meaning. Whatever they do has a purpose that transforms them, their surroundings, and, ultimately society. Those who live a meaningful life are happier and their every day is an exciting journey. You should also find purpose and meaning in your life and for that, it is never too late.

Know what is important for you to lead a happy, prosperous and contented life. You may note down your top 5 things or top 10 things that you believe are the crux of how you want to spend your life. This can include efforts like 'work hard,' or 'help someone every day or 'plant a tree often and promote a positive habit in your surroundings.' You may also include more fulfilling ideas, like 'develop a new skill and start life afresh' or 'practice Yoga and meditation and teach others as well.' There could be thousands of ideas. All such ideas would give a new meaning to your life once you start pursuing them.

Stay aware of yourself. Stay mindful of what you do at all times and even in your free time. Make sure to live a life according to your choice, principles, goal, and passion. Review your actions daily and work towards correcting your actions through staying conscious. Yoga & meditation is a time-tested tool for achieving such consciousness. It helps you increase your self-

Live a meaningful life

awareness every day. Right now everyone is worshipping Goddess Durga in Chaitra Navratri. This is the best time to meditate by keeping various forms of Goddess Durga in the mind. These forms bestow bravery, abstinence, and willpower upon seekers so that they can achieve success in life by staying conscious and focused.

It is futile to chase multifarious goals in a day. That won't lead anywhere. Collect all your energy and place them on one particular aim. With such attention, you will become able to lessen the stress linked with efforts. You must learn how to stay focused on a single goal despite distractions to find the true meaning of your life.

Compassion could give the greatest meaning to your life since it leads to ultimate happiness. Look around yourself you will see scores of people who need your support and help. Do something for them, talk to them about their problems and needs. You can show them the right path in life and through this small gesture, you can give something back to society.

Such small efforts will give a whole new meaning to your life. Take part in more of such activities. You will see your life has more meaning in it. Remember, at any stage of life, it would be gracious to be able to say- 'I took many small actions that made life a little easier and better for others and that gave great meaning to my life.'

Sudhanshuji Maharaj

Challenges of cascading Barelvi extremism



M M KHAJOURIA

Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan announced its arrival as a major sectarian force through a massive sit-in in Islamabad in 2017. The issue for protest was well chosen. It focused on a clause in the Election Act relating to the finality of prophet hood, whipped up religious sentiments, created a mob frenzy of frightening proportions. Predictably, the matter soon turned into a political controversy. The stand-off continued for a week and finally it fell to the lot of 'Security agencies' to broker the deal. The civilian government was made to sign on the dotted line. The demands of the group were conceded. A senior intelligence officer was also a signatory to the deal along with the then interior minister. "It is hard to recall another instance of an intelligence official involved in brokering a deal between the government and extremists challenging the writ of the state," wrote

eminent Journalist Zahid Hussain. To the utter shame of Pakistan, an appalling footage of Punjab Rangers Chief shamelessly distributing cash to protesters, was telecasted. The authority of the state was seldom so compromised. It was much more than appeasement. It was abject surrender to the lawbreakers and non-state actors thereby undermining the legitimacy of the civil administration. This episode ended up boosting the public support and morale of the Sunni/Barelvi extremists. The TLP emerged as a major political force in the 2018 election. Even though it failed to win even a single seat, the group emerged as the third largest group in terms of votes in Punjab. Religiously motivated groups have successfully paralyzed civic life in Pakistan time and again but what happened this week is extremely serious. The state appeared to have disappeared as the followers of a radical cleric blocked highways and train tracks disconnecting access to the country's main cities.

Violent mobs held sway in many parts of the country. The videos circulating on social media of showing some security personnel approvingly responding to crowd should serve as wake up call to the Pak authorities.

Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan chief Saad Hussain Rizvi, was detained a day after he threatened to storm Islamabad for 'failure to implement the agreement to expel the French Ambassador' over blasphemous images and the French president's controversial remarks.

It was the same policy of appeasement that led the PTI government to concede to the TLP's irrational demands in November 2020. The deal ended the protest but further weakened the states, own authority. It is obvious that the administration as well as the Government, have failed to grasp any lessons from its mistakes or the cost of delayed action.

In Punjab, where Labbaik hold the sway, a few thousand zealots were able to

paralyse the whole administration. Observers of the scene feel that the violence could have easily been controlled if timely action was taken against the rioters. Instead, the inaction has further emboldened the rampaging mob. The virtual collapse of the administration in the face of mob violence is alarming to say the least, underscores how Pak Government is surrendering before rising religious extremism. The spectacle of the mob beating police officers and making them hostage has exposed the false claims of the rule of law. The rise of Barelvi terrorism in Pakistan should serve as wake call for us in India. It would be, to say the least naïve on our part to ignore the impact that it is bound to have here in India. Remember, the Barelvis in India have traditionally and historically been nationalists, moderates and anti-terrorism. Barelvi Ulemas and administration should jointly ensure that the monster does not raise its head in India.

Unheard saga of Prankot: Fear, miseries & migration

SURESH SHARMA

Twenty-one people belonging to minority community were killed by terrorists at village Prankot in Mahore tehsil on Friday night, 20 April 1998 leading to fresh migration from the area. This one liner headline on the newspapers, and breaking news on Idiot-box was just the start of the new game of agony, distress, fear of already silent and poor Hindu minority on mountains, whose mantra of 'सर्व भवन्तु सुखिनः' was quashed with the blow of axe and dagger of those terrorists. This was termed as massacre, which is the gruesome cold blooded killing of number of helpless or unresisting people of particular population to instill fear in remaining one. This cold-blooded murder happened at a place on the higher reaches of mountainous ranges, where they live in sparsely distributed thatched huts with chickens, cattle, sheep and some crops.

Village Prankot, the Heaven turned barren

Situated at a height of 6,600 feet, Prankot village forms part of Jij Patwar, which comprises 10 villages having a population of 5,170 people. Significantly, the entire Patwar which touches Mahore on one side and Kandi (Rajouri) on another, is considered to be 'no-man's land' by the security forces, official sources said. Prankot is not as typical village as a cluster of homes scattered across several hundred meters on mountain sides. Families in this desperately poor region rely on earnings from a single maize crop a year.

Mountainous and hilly terrains of Prankot

Significantly, no security forces or police have been deployed in the area though people have been migrating from here for many years due to fear of terrorists. The nearest police station from the site of massacre is at Thub, located at a distance of 15 Km and one has to trek a hilly terrain to reach there. Well-placed sources in the district administration at Udhampur said that the area had been a 'safe zone' for terrorists as it was under the operation command of Border Security Force deployed in Rajouri district. The security forces from neighbouring district visit the area once or twice a month, as they have to trek a hilly terrain of about 40 Km from last motable spot at Chassna.

Villagers' rendezvous with terrorists in daily chores

It was on intervening night of April 17 and 18 in 1998, that a big group of 14 terrorists including nine foreigners, of Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and five locals had descended on village Prankot in Mahore tehsil of the then Udhampur district, now a part of Reasi district, and set the house of innocent civilians on fire by sprinkling kerosene oil. The terrorists, who were believed to be foreign mercenaries, dragged victims out of their houses, before killing them. Cold blooded murders on night of April 17 in Reasi district could signify a renewed round of macabre killings similar to the ones that punctuated the summer of 1996-97.

The villagers who belonged to Hindu Community used to see the group of armed terrorists, dressed in combat fatigues, moving through the dense forests nearby villages of Prankot, Dakikot earlier in evening and mornings. The sight of such groups was common around their village and villagers paid little attention and used to attend these armed terrorist. Inaccessible by road and several hours' walk from nearest security force picket, villagers in the area had arrived at a quiet truce with terrorists, providing them food and shelter. The Hindus were silently bearing their atrocities as terrorist would come for grocery and eatables at their home, used to demand chicken, sheep, flour and other items. The appalling level of telecommunications facilities, mountain terrains, zero security scenario, which means that locals in these villages about 20 Km up on the mountain cannot easily contact any security personnel in Reasi or Udhampur. Also poor roads cut off for months by landslides, makes effective counter-terrorist work near-impossible. Cynics might be forgiven for concluding that killers and their fascist political sponsors have an obvious vested interest in butchering region's Hindus to change demography, among highest reaches of mountains.

Dreadful night

Sheru, a resident of Narkot, said after massacre to reporters, "I saw the terrorists going to the house of Gujjar, Salam Din, on Friday, 17th April, 1998 in afternoon. I didn't take it seriously as that is common here on mountains. There aren't any security forces or police deployed and it is natural to see terrorists hanging around." But evening of April 17-18, things were to go badly wrong as fatal night was coming that would change the pleasant and happy village to darkness, fire and gloom. Prankot on 19th morning would be the headlines across Indian and world media. Terrorists came knocking on doors at night. First, they went to Mani Ram's house on Thursday night. Then they knocked on other doors in Prankot village. All they wanted, they said, was shelter for the night. Terror had slipped into the village of Prankot, silently moving from house to house, hacking residents to death with axes and scythes. A teenage girl, Bitto managed to rouse her two younger sisters and asked them to sneak away, hiding in mountain forests, but their parents did not escape. She was set on fire by terrorists. Over the next 24 hours, the villagers realised they had played host to their own death. It took 10 hours for news to reach authorities and security forces reached only after a day. The then Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah said, "This is a shocking incident. I have seen tragedies earlier, but this was bloodcurdling. No bullets were fired, the villagers were butchered."

Villagers' nightmare, did they shelter death?

Dileep Singh, Son of Sobha Ram at migrant NTPC camp Talwara said, "People saw fire coming out of Shobha Ram's house on nearby hill. Along with some villagers, they rushed to the house," he recalled, "but they returned midway after seeing terrorists. It was warning enough, all villagers and their families fled instantly". With tears in his eyes, he said, "One of my sister Bitto Devi ran downhill in burning state and was found dead near the Nallah 4 days after the incident but she saved her two younger sisters".

"My mother from Ladday village Bindro Devi (40), who was sister of Lamberdar Mani Ram had gone to his brother's house, also got killed with Lamberdar Mani Ram (60). His wife, son, daughter-in-law and grandsons, one five years old and other two years old," said Chanehlo Devi, one of only 3 daughters of Bindro Devi, niece of Mani Ram.

Without firing a single shot, the terrorists killed 26 people belonging to minority Hindu community in the village on Friday night. Eyewitnesses said while some of victims were killed with sharp-edged weapons, others were burnt alive. "By massacring innocent civilians from minorities, the terrorists wanted to force migration of minority community from the area and they succeeded in that as majority of Hindu families had shifted to Talwara and Pouni in Reasi district within few days of killings," said Chamail Singh, another survivor of massacre, who is also putting up at Talwara migrant camp.

Talwara Camp breeding anger, grief and dejection

Migration of people has brought alarming unmanageable, inevitable and persistent problems in almost every person of camp. The life has not only affected the adults and olds but also the young ones. The problem that migrants, residents of Talwara Camp face can't be described in words.

Substandard, dingy quarters of NHPC of high density and congestion, overcrowding, insanitary conditions, absence of basic amenities like water supply, drainage and sewerage and disposal of garbage. The unsafe and inadequate buildings provided two decades ago are now in deplorable condition. Small room structure is insufficient for families extended after 23 years. Heavy rains have made several dwellings in camp extremely vulnerable and residents say they live in imminent danger of their home being collapsed or washed away. The condition of lane to their quarters add to their woes during rainy season as it's very risky even to walk as it turns slippery. During rains and winds, the asbestos sheets are unable to save them from water leaking and many people get injured. Dilapidated conditioned residential accommodation with crack on walls and ceiling makes them unfit for living.

YOUR COLUMN

Pay attention towards children's sitting habits

Dear Editor,

During COVID times, everything has changed. Our lifestyle, our study schedule, working schedule all have changed. Now again with current education session going online, it is important that we make sure that our children are sitting in a good posture during online classes, so that they do not face pain in back or neck.

Incorrect posture, while sitting in front of a computer for long can cause strain on eyes, neck and e back. It's not just the adults who are affected but kids, as young as 5 years are now complaining of back-pain and aches. Preteens and teenagers are being diagnosed with acute problems like Spondylosis.

Doctors say that problem can be aggravated by long hours of online schooling, improper sitting and lack of physical activity by children. Long screen time can impair your child's spine and lead to back stiffness, physical fatigue and other health problems. With some more months extended for online learning, it has become all

the more imperative that good posture and suitable learning environment must be crafted even at home. I would like to share few tips to make this easy for moms at home.

A home desk should be patterned similar to that of a classroom. Do not encourage them to slouch, lie down and watch classes on their gadgets. Encourage them to maintain proper posture while they are sitting and studying at table. Their feet should touch ground, screen elevated at the right level so that they don't have to slouch and look straight ahead at computer screen.

If you have a child younger than 8 years, consider getting a special desk or chair, which suits his structure and doesn't harm back. Too much of screen time is bad for their body as it can induce unnecessary stress on your eyes, neck and back muscles. Long hours sitting down can also turn your little ones physically inactive. A simple solution to this would be to tell them to take frequent breaks between classes. It could be a simple walk around the room or doing routine exercises which would stretch muscles and improve flexibility. As a rule, every individual should get up for 5-10 minutes every hour and take a short-walk.

When we sit and focus on laptop, we put a lot of stress on our lower back muscles and lumbar region. The extra stress is also one of the reasons why a lot of children tend

to slouch or have bad posture, which can end-up causing problems later on. To fix this problem, try and support their lower back by rolling a comfortable pillow or towel at the back of the chair when they sit. It would make their desk a lot more comfortable.

Moreover, do not encourage them to watch classes on phone while lying on the couch. If possible, instruct children to attend classes and complete assignments on a computer unit, preferably affixed to a desk. Mobiles and tablets have a smaller screen, which is bad for their eyes. Kids who attend classes on phone are more likely to lean back on couch, bed and be less attentive as well. Therefore, it's crucial you maintain a good study environment if you want their performance to match that of a classroom setting.

It is also important to make sure that they get all necessary nutrients, vitamins and minerals needed for growing ages. A complete, healthy meal which contains a rich source of calcium, magnesium, Vitamin-B12 and D would help them strengthen muscles and bones, and may even combat the ill-effects of long hours of sitting and bad postural habits. By following these simple tips one can ensure that children have a good time while studying online without affecting their health.

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