## The lessons of Ramadan.

**The antidote to greed.**

One of the most obvious lessons of fasting is to curb the evil of greed. Muslims are taught to shun greed in all of its forms and fasting certainly is a great exercise in preventing it. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said ‘if man had a valley of gold, then he would still want a second.’

Spiritual masters have almost focussed on hunger, not to create anorexics but to teach self discipline. Stomach is key impulse of people. If a person can control this then all the other desires will follow suit. This is why the Prophet advised unmarried people to fast, because it is an exercise to teach restraint. Imam al-Qushayri said, ‘For me to raise my hands from my plate while I am hungry is better than the whole night in prayer.’

**Self-restraint.**

This is an important theme in all religions, not just Islam. Fasting teaches us the beauty of controlling one self. It is a means by which one can discover the physical and spiritual powers of the human body. There is a famous saying in Islam that ‘Whosoever discovers himself, has discovered his Lord.’

**Collectiveness and unity.**

Deliberately, Allah wants all Muslims to fast at the same time, throughout the world. Though clearly an individual act of worship, Muslims always feel that Ramadan is a time of unity, brotherhood and collectiveness. Muslims have the pre-dawn meal together, they pray together and they break their fact together. Then, at the end of the month, they celebrate Eid al-Fitr together.

**Appreciation of favours.**

Do we appreciate the favours around us? Most of the time, we are fussy about the food we are served, the service we are provided with and the time it takes for it. Our food has to be a piece of art. What can be done to ensure we appreciate favours? In short, it has to be withdrawn, even temporarily. Only then is it appreciated. We complain about the NHS daily but we will only value it the day it disappears. By fasting, Muslims are learning to truly appreciate food. By depriving a person of it for a while, Muslims realise the true worth of food and water once again. Moreover, they tend not to waste food.

**True affection and empathy with the poor.**

Many of the leaders attempt to connect with the underprivileged but fail miserably. David Cameron admitted he could not live on a zero-hour contract. Other MPs have tried to impress the media by living on poor wages for a week. Unfortunately we know more about the lifestyle of the rich and famous. Fasting goes a long way in trying to feel what true hunger is like, a plight that affects billions throughout the world. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) loved and poor and would supplicate ‘O Lord! Give me life as a poor, give me death as a poor and raise me on the Day of Resurrection along with the poor.’ If anything we are alienating the poor and making them feel worthless. The bankers nearly bankrupted this country yet they still command respect.

**Outside the comfort zone.**

For one month in the year, Muslims are asked to step outside their comfort zone and push themselves physically and spiritually. It is a time when Muslims realize the power of their bodies and to appreciate that they are truly stronger than they think. No one has ever achieved greatness in their comfort zone. Success comes when one steps outside it.

**Morality.**

Fasting teaches us that if we can go 19 hours without food and water, why can’t we go without swearing and backbiting? The former is crucial to our very survival, whereas the latter is not. Continuing the same type of corrupt behaviour whilst fasting is the most hypocritical thing a Muslim can do. That is why the Prophet (peace be upon him) said that if a person cannot give up loose talk in Ramadan, then Allah does not require him to give up food and water.