

Feeding my soul

Daily Spiritual Exercises and Reflections

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Welcome to Feeding my soul

Sustaining spiritual growth is not easy. We are weak and the attractions of the materialistic world and our busy schedule make it difficult to continuously grow spiritually. However, the holy month of Ramadan is like a pit stop on a racecourse. We are busy competing and running around during the year, but Ramadan offers a resting spot to revamp and recharge. However, we will still get distracted on this pit stop. We will want to go back to the racing course, but little do we know that if we do not make good use of our little time in the pit stop, our journey ahead will be slow and unproductive.

This booklet is a humble attempt to give you an opportunity to make good use of the Holy month of Ramadan by reflecting daily on the Holy Qur'an and acting on the many reflections it provides. This action of disciplining the soul is through spiritual introspection or '*Tahthheb an-nafs*'. This is the process of learning about the soul through continuous and rigorous monitoring and assessment of the self.

A session of spiritual introspection means you purposely and actively examine and improve the self. Ask yourself, how many times in the past month have you had a session of spiritual introspection? How many times have you given a few minutes of your daily schedule to look deep into the self and examine the good and the bad? If not many, then this booklet will guide you to do so in this Holy month.

There are four stages to spiritual introspection:

- 1. Al-Musharata.** Al-Musharata derived from the Arabic word *shart*, is when you set out conditions for the self to perform good deeds and avoid bad deeds. The important thing is if you do set this condition, or Al-Musharata, you should take it seriously and follow it through.
- 2. Al-Muraqaba.** Al-Muraqaba is to observe the actions for the condition. The root meaning of Al-Muraqaba is "to watch, observe and regard attentively". Fundamentally, being in a state of Al-Muraqaba means we comprehend that Allah (swt) is always close to us and watching us.
- 3. Al-Muhasaba.** This is the stage where the believer must assess whether they have succeeded or failed to meet the condition or Al-Musharata. Simply, Al-Muhasaba is the ongoing account of the self.
- 4. Al-Muaqaba.** Once the believer has performed Al-Muhasaba and has critically assessed themselves, they may wish to self-discipline themselves if they have failed to meet the Al-Musharata. This is what is known as Al-Muaqaba.

In this booklet, we have included the Al-Musharata, a plan into how to implement it, Al-Muhasaba and Al-Muaqaba for every verse which is reflected upon daily. The stage of Al-Muraqaba is typically the same for all conditions as you must always watch, observe and regard attentively your action during the day.

Table 1 is included at the end of the booklet to help you complete your self-assessment (Al-Muhasaba) and the possible self-discipline (Al-Muaqaba) stages of introspection.

Furthermore, we have also included daily spiritual experience scores to help you quantify your daily spiritual growth. We know this is difficult to do but it will give you a rough indication of your spiritual progress during the month and whether or not you need to change something to increase your scores. Table 2 provides a space for adding the scores together.

We pray to Allah swt to help us all achieve closeness to Him in this Holy month by reflecting on the Holy Quran and consequently acting on those reflections through spiritual introspection.

May Allah swt be with you.

The Elif Team.

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يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمْ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمْ الْعُسْرَ وَلِتُكْمِلُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا
اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَاكُمْ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

Transliteration: yureedu Allahu bikumu alyusra wala yureedubikumu
alAAusra walitukmiloo alAAiddata walitukabbiroo AllahaAAala ma hadakum
walaAAallakum tashkuroon

Translation: Allah intends ease for you, not hardship, so that you may
complete the prescribed period and proclaim the greatness of Allah for
guiding you, and perhaps you will be grateful.

Quran Reference: Suratul Baqarah, No. 2, Aya 185

Main message of the passage: Allah (swt) does not want to impose difficulty on us by asking us to fast. He has created our bodies to withstand abstaining from food and drink for a while. In fact, it is good for the body to fast. Instead of feeding the stomach, God wants us to feed our souls. The feast of the soul includes delicacies such as intense mercy, forgiveness, generosity, acceptance, love and gratefulness. The physical challenge of fasting allows us to fully savour these delicacies. Such joys of the soul would not be possible without the physical hardship of the body. It is Allah's love for human beings that He invites and encourages us to gain the extraordinary blessings of fasting. Enjoy the spirit of the fast and allow it to change you from within.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must not complain about my fast.

Plan: Whenever I get a thought about hunger or wanting to complain about the fast or its duration, I take a few deep breaths and acknowledge the thought without processing it further.

Al-Muhasaba: Night of 5th Ramadan.

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I will fast one extra day after Ramadan

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

كُونُوا رَبَّانِيِّينَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تُعَلِّمُونَ الْكِتَابَ وَبِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَدْرُسُونَ

Transliteration: kūnū rabbānīna bimā kuntum tu'allimūnal-kitāba wabimā kuntum tadrusūn

Translation: Be Godly people by virtue of your constant teaching of the Scripture and of your constant study thereof.

Quran Reference: Surat Āl-i Imran, No.3, Aya 79

Main message of the passage: We must be Godly at all times. This verse informs us that we become Godly through contemplating and studying the Holy Qu'ran and teaching it to others. *rbbani* is one whose connection to the *Rabb* or God is strong and their worship, obedience, and submission to God is high. The human being - as the representative of Allah on Earth - takes on the nurturing qualities of the *Rabb* for other human beings. The duty of the human being is not just to strive for perfection for himself. He also needs to help others towards perfection and facilitate that journey for others as much as possible. In the process he manifests the qualities of God and becomes Godly.

Spiritual Introspection

AI-Musharata: I must recite 'La ilaha ila Allah' every morning when I wake up in the Month of Ramadan.

Plan: I will put a reminder on my phone every morning

AI-Muhasaba: Every night before I sleep

AI-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the AI-Musharata, I will recite 1000 times subhaan Allah.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لآيَاتٍ
لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ

Transliteration: Inna fee khalqi assamawatiwal-ardi wakhtilafi allayli wannaharilaayatin li-olee al-albab

Translation: Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day - there are indeed Signs for men of understanding.

Quran Reference: Surat Al-i-imran, No.3, Aya 190

Main message of the passage: The magnificent creation of God is a clear sign of His existence for those that reflect and contemplate. Some of us have become so accustomed to the beauty of Allah's creation and take it for granted because we have not contemplated it. Everything in the universe has been created with a purpose. It is precisely measured both qualitatively and quantitatively. We just don't reflect on it! Our ungodly and self-centred heart and mind distract us from the beauty of Allah's creation. The creation of the night and day is mesmerising to say the least. Has the Sun ever 'decided' not to shine its rays onto the Earth? Has the Earth ever stopped circulating around the Sun? These are the signs for people who reflect.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must reflect on 5 of God's creation in the Holy month of Ramadan.

Plan: I will make time in the evenings, possibly before suhoor, for reflection

Al-Muhasaba: 10th Ramadan

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I will skip eating meat for 3 days in the holy month.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَزَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَهُمْ يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ

Transliteration: Fa-ammaladhina amanu fazadthum imanana wahum yastabshirun

Translation: As for those who have faith, it increases them in faith, and they rejoice.

Quran Reference: Suratul Tawba, No 9, Aya 124

Main message of the passage: This verse refers to the response of believers to verses of Quran that were revealed. The hypocrites who listened to the verses asked each other sarcastically if the verses had increased them in faith. This was to show their indifference to the verses and their scepticism regarding its effect. Allah (swt) answers by saying that the verses increase the faith of the believers. It has the opposite effect on the hypocrites, as mentioned in the next verse. It only adds to their spiritual darkness. Verses of the Quran are like droplets of rain that fall on permeable soil and are absorbed and stored. The soil mixes with the water, and a rapid movement takes place beneath the surface as the water soaks through deeper levels within the soil. The whole process that takes place internally is then manifested through the growth that shoots up above the surface. Such is the effect of verses of the Quran on the heart of a believer. There is an internal movement that takes place, a process that becomes visible through the words and deeds of the believer.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must listen to at least 10 minutes of the Holy Qur'an every day for the remainder of the Holy month.

Plan: I will download an app and make a schedule every day

Al-Muhasaba: 10th Ramadan

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I will listen to the Holy Quran in full after Ramadan.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

يَا وَيْلَتَى لَيْتَنِي لَمْ أَتَّخِذْ فُلَانًا خَلِيلًا

Transliteration: Ya waylata laytani lam attakhidh fulanan khalila

Translation: Woe to me! I wish I had not taken so and so as a friend!

Quran Reference: Suratul Furqan, No.25, Aya 28

Main message of the passage: This verse warns us to be careful of the type of people we choose to be our friends. Allah (swt) wants us to be cautious towards who we associate with and more importantly those whom we call our friends. Our friends define who we become, and the reality of their friendship will be seen and felt in the hereafter. We don't want to end up saying: "Woe to me! I wish I had not taken so and so as a friend!"

We must ask ourselves: Do my friends remind me of Allah (swt) and take me towards the path of the Prophet (s) and his family? Does being with my friends make me speak ill of people? Do I feel I can trust my friends with my secrets? Do I feel I am listened to and cared for by my friends? Do I feel I am supported by my friends?

Use this verse to remind yourself that the company you keep has a great impact on the quality of your life both in this world and the next.

Spiritual Introspection

AI-Musharata: I must reach out to at least one friend that I have not spoken to for a while

Plan: I will go through contacts on my phone

AI-Muhasaba: 15th Ramadan

AI-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the AI-Musharata, I must pay £10 to charity.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيِّنًا لَّعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَى

Transliteration: Fa qula lahu qawlan layyinan la'allahu yatadhakaru aw yakhsha

Translation: And speak to him with gentle speech that perhaps he may be reminded or fear [Allah].

Quran Reference: Surat Taha, No. 20, Aya 44

Main message of the passage: In this verse, Prophet Musa (a) along with his brother Prophet Harun (a) was asked to speak to Fir'awn in the most kind and gentle manner so they might influence him positively. The unfortunate Fir'awn ignored their message despite their gentle and soft manner and continued in his evil ways.

The overlying message in the Quran when it comes to communicating with others, and specifically when enjoining good and forbidding evil, is to do so in a manner that is polite and attractive, regardless of the outcome. It is through love and kindness that people are attracted towards the truth or made to fear the consequences of their wrongdoings. This was the methodology of all our Prophets and Imams in their dealings with others when teaching the message of God.

Good communication involves listening (not hearing) with an open mind, not making unnecessary judgments, having empathy, good body language and displaying effective emotional intelligence.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must not raise my voice on anyone

Plan: I must always be on alert, if I am about to get angry I will take deep breaths and calm myself down.

Al-Muhasaba: 15th Ramadan

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I will fast one extra day after Ramadan

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ

Transliteration: Wala taqfu ma laysa laka bihi 'ilm

Translation: Do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge.

Quran Reference: Suratul Isra, No.17, Aya 36

Main message of the passage: This verse tells the believer to refrain from going on the path about which he/she knows nothing. We must not believe in something we are not certain about. We must not speak about something we do not know about and we should not do anything we have no knowledge about. This is a comprehensive command from the Almighty (swt) which applies to individual actions as well as in interactions and judgement of others. It covers many wrongdoings such as backbiting, giving false witness and spreading rumours. The problem we are facing in the 21st century is the spread of fake news in social media. This is primarily due to our ignorance in forwarding material that we have no knowledge about. We must be vigilant and take caution as spreading information is a responsibility and we may be questioned about it.

Spiritual Introspection

AI-Musharata: I must not forward any material I have no information or knowledge about.

Plan: I must cut down from my time on social media and be vigilant at all times while using it.

AI-Muhasaba: 15th Ramadan

AI-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the AI-Musharata, I will not use social media for three days.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

وَلَا تَجْعَلْ فِي قُلُوبِنَا غِلًّا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ رَءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ

Transliteration: Wala taj'a fi qulubana ghilla lil-ladhina amanu rabbana innaka ra'ufun rahim

Translation: Do not put any resentment in our hearts toward the faithful. Our Lord, You are indeed most kind and merciful.

Quran Reference: Suratul Hashr, No.59, Aya 10

Main message of the passage: In this verse the believers ask Allah (swt) to remove any diseases in their hearts towards other believers. This is a necessary part of the self-building process they have undertaken to progress towards God. The diseases of the heart include jealousy, hatred, spite, and other similar moral vices which can spread fast while remaining hidden and undiscovered. They cover the heart with darkness and prevent the light of Allah (swt) from being reflected within. The process of removing this darkness in the heart is through forgiveness and love. As difficult as it sounds, we need to learn to forgive those who have hurt us otherwise we are only adding more suffering to ourselves or our own selves.

To go back to Almighty God with a pure heart is the goal of every believer. There can be no place for hatred in a pure heart. Recite this verse often to remind yourself of the need to purge the heart of all negativity towards others.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must always try to think good of people, regardless of their action.

Plan: I will try to see the good in people.

Al-Muhasaba: 15th Ramadan

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I must recite 1000 times astaghfur Allah (O Allah forgive me)

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَكُنْ مِنَ السَّاجِدِينَ

Transliteration: Fasabbih bihamdi rabbika wa-kun minas-sajdin

Translation: So celebrate the praise of your Lord and be among those who prostrate.

Quran Reference: Suratul Hijr, No.15, Aya 98

Main message of the passage: This verse tells the Prophet (s) to glorify Allah (swt) with His praise. It was revealed when the polytheists rejected the mission of the Holy Prophet (saw). Allah (swt) knows the Prophet (saw) is upset at what they say. He tells the Prophet (s) to seek comfort through the glorification of Allah (swt) and prostration. Glorification of Allah (swt) erases the adverse effects of the harsh words of others. It reminds the glorifier that ultimately Allah is above everything. All the pettiness of daily human interaction, the small mindedness and mean words of people, the big fuss over things that don't matter – all these seem so insignificant in the face of the glorification of Allah. It is therefore a tonic for emotional and mental stress. If you are going through difficulty in your life, make sure you recite tasbih glorifying the Almighty (swt).

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must recite and contemplate on tasbih Al-Zahra (as) after every prayer for the remainder of the holy month.

Plan: I will put a sibha (or tasbiha) in my prayer mat

Al-Muhasaba: 15th Ramadan

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I must pray one full day qada prayers (missed prayers).

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

وَلْيَخْشَ الَّذِينَ لَوْ تَرَكَوْا مِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّةً ضِعَافًا خَافُوا عَلَيْهِمْ

Transliteration: Walyakhshal-ladhina law taraku min khalfihim dhurriyatan dhi'afan khafu 'alayhim

Translation: Let those fear (the result of mistreating orphans) who, were they to leave behind weak offspring, would be concerned on their account.

Quran Reference: Suratul Nisa, No 4, Aya 9

Main message of the passage: The verse is part of a passage discussing inheritance. The verse before this one emphasizes that the orphans must be granted their inheritance fairly. Allah (swt) asks people to think about how afraid they would be for their own offspring if they were orphaned. Just as they would be greatly concerned about how their children would be treated, they should also be concerned about how the children of other people are treated. They should respect the rights of the orphans the way they would like their children's rights to be respected. This is one of the principles of empathy. It allows you to step into someone else's shoes for a moment and understand how they feel. This is a powerful healing tool for you and for the person you are empathising with. They get the comfort of knowing someone else has genuine understanding of their pain, and you experience their discomfort thus allowing you to develop emotionally.

Some of the ways to be empathetic with others are to 1) acknowledge their pain, 2) show gratitude that the person opened up, 3) show interest and 4) be encouraging and supportive.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must pay amount to the orphans every Thursday night

Plan: I will put a reminder on my phone

Al-Muhasaba: Last Thursday in the holy month

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I must pay £50 to charity

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

وَإِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ لَا تَحْصُوهَا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَذَلُّومٌ كَفَّارٌ

Transliteration: Wa In ta'uddu ni 'mata-llahi la tuhsuha inna al-insana lathaloomun kaffar

Translation: If you count the favours of Allah you will not be able to number them. Indeed, mankind is (generally) most unjust and ungrateful.

Quran Reference: Surat Ibrahim, No.14, Aya 34

Main message of the passage: In this verse Allah says His favours and blessings are so many that we cannot count them. This is because of the vast number of blessings in this world, including the number of blessings that are hidden and are being discovered over time. The blessings of Allah colour all aspects of human life. From the beauty and organization of the universe to the complexity and power of the human body. Having gratitude to the Almighty (swt) for all these blessings can only benefit us. Aside from helping us to connect to God by appreciating His blessings, gratitude has been shown to strengthen our physical and mental health, enhance empathy and reduce aggression as well as improve our self-esteem.

The key to gratitude lies in appreciating what we have. Choose your own way of being grateful to God for a few minutes each day through remembering and counting some specific blessings each day. You may recite two *rak'ats shukr* salat, perform sajdah of gratitude, recite with reflection *Munajat of Shakirin* (Supplication No. 74 in *Sahifa Sajjadiyya*), being content with what you have, or anything else that works for you. Do it regularly and watch how it transforms your life.

Spiritual Introspection

AI-Musharata: I must write one thing I am grateful for every day for the remainder of the Holy month of Ramadan (gratitude journal).

Plan: I will purchase a gratitude journal and put it on my bed side cabinet.

AI-Muhasaba: 20th Ramadan

AI-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the AI-Musharata, I must recite 1000 times shukran lillah (thanks to Allah).

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

Transliteration: Thalika alkitabul larayba feehi hudan lilmuttaqeen

Translation: This is the Book, there is no doubt in it, a guidance to the God-conscious.

Quran Reference: Suratul Baqarah, No.2, Aya 2

Main message of the passage: This verse at the start of Surat Baqarah sets the record straight. It clearly and emphatically states two main points about the Holy Qur'an: 1) it is the book of truth and 2) it is a guide for those who are God conscious. It is the book of divine and true knowledge. It should not be read for the sake of attaining and storing knowledge, but to comprehend and transform this knowledge into what we can act upon with wisdom and piety. The Holy Qur'an was revealed to all mankind, and thus its powerful guidance and teachings can penetrate into anyone's heart and transform into wisdom. Mankind has been bestowed with such a noble book of knowledge that it should be read on a daily basis in order to sail in the voyage of the ma'rifah of the Author of this Holy Book.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must reflect on one verse of the Holy Qur'an every week for the remainder of the holy month of Ramadan.

Plan: I will use www.al-islam.org to search for exegesis of the verses I will reflect on.

Al-Muhasaba: Laylatul Qadr (night of 23rd Ramadan).

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I must fast one extra day after the holy month.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

وَأَدْعُو رَبِّي عَسَىٰ أَلاَّ أَكُونَ بِدُعَاءِ رَبِّي شَقِيًّا

Transliteration: Wa-ad'u Rabbi 'asa alla akuna bidu'a'i Rabbi shaqiyya

Translation: I will supplicate to my Lord. Perhaps, by my prayer to my Lord, I shall be not unblessed.

Quran Reference: Surat Maryam, No.19, Aya 48

Main message of the passage: This verse was the supplication of Prophet Ibrahim (as) when his uncle (or father) refused to accept the Oneness of God. The Prophet (as) resorted to supplication by showing trust and hope in the Lord that he will not be disappointed in his supplication. The word *shaqiyyah* means disappointed, un-blessed or one who goes through difficulty. It's opposite is *sa'id*, meaning fortunate or blessed. Prophet Ibrahim (as) shows hope that his supplication will remove hardships from him and make him fortunate. The sweetness of supplication itself, a connection between a servant and the true Lord who controls all things, is by itself a removal of distress even before the answer is received.

A believer is always between hope and fear. Hope in Allah (swt) shows love and trust and motivates action. Fear brings about caution and restraint. Together, these two emotions spur a believer's journey towards the straight path.

Always have hope and trust in the Almighty when supplicating to Him. He knows what is best for you.

Spiritual Introspection

AI-Musharata: I must make dua'a for all my family and friends during the holy month. I must mention them by name.

Plan: I will make a list of my family and friend's names and make dua'a for them after one of the daily prayers.

AI-Muhasaba: Laylatul Qadr (night of 23rd Ramadan).

AI-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the AI-Musharata, I will fast one extra day after the holy month.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

رَبَّنَا آتِنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً وَهَيِّئْ لَنَا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا رَشَدًا

Transliteration: Rabbana atina min ladunka rahmatan wa-hyyi' lana min amrina rashada

Translation: Our Lord! Grant us mercy from Yourself and help us on to rectitude in our affair.

Quran Reference: Suratul Kahf, No.18, Aya 10

Main message of the passage: This is the supplication of the People of the Cave. They prayed to Allah (swt) for two things: His mercy and the right direction. The word *rashada* in this verse comes from *rushd*, meaning that which takes you to the right direction, and the path that is straight, and upright. It refers to reaching the correct goal, to possess good judgement, scrupulous thinking and appropriate behaviour. The human being instinctively seeks perfection and has the desire to pursue the path that will lead towards it. But because of limited awareness and hastiness in reaching it he often strays from that path. He may seek perfection and success in the wrong places. Thus believers pray for true direction in their pursuit of *al-sirat al-mustaqim* and the proximity to the Lord. We seek from Allah (swt) to keep us on the straight path and help us to reach our desired goals in life. Like the people of the Cave, this is primarily done through asking Allah (swt) for forgiveness, guiding us to the right direction and consequently the right actions.

Spiritual Introspection

AI-Musharata: I must recite the dua'a of the people of the cave at least once a day in my qunoot during prayer for the remainder of the holy month.

Plan: I will memorise it and recite it during every Maghrib prayers' qunoot.

AI-Muhasaba: 20th Ramadan

AI-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the AI-Musharata, I will pray Salatul Layl (night prayers) 5 days on a row.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

وَقَدْ نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الْكِتَابِ أَنْ إِذَا سَمِعْتُمْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ يُكْفَرُ بِهَا
وَيُسْتَهْزَأُ بِهَا فَلَا تَقْعُدُوا مَعَهُمْ حَتَّى يَخُوضُوا فِي حَدِيثٍ غَيْرِهِ
إِنَّكُمْ إِذَا مِثَلْتُمْ

Transliteration: Wa-qad nazzala 'alaykum fil-kitabi an idha sami 'tum ayatillahi yukfaru biha wa-yustahza'u biha fala taq 'udu ma 'ahum hatta yakhudu fi hadithin ghayrih; innakum idhan mithluhum

Translation: Certainly He has sent down to you in the Book that when you hear Allah's signs being disbelieved and derided, do not sit with them until they engage in some other discourse, or else you [too] will be like them.

Quran Reference: Suratul Nisa, No. 4, Aya 140

Main message of the passage: Allah (swt) in this verse enjoins believers not to sit in gatherings in which His signs are denied and mocked. By staying with them, the believers run the risk of becoming like them, or at least being labelled as part of them.

Sometimes in family or social situations it becomes difficult to distance yourself from discussions that in some way reject the words of God. People may talk with scepticism, arrogance, dismissing religious values and criticizing the teachings of Islam. When someone happens to be part of such gatherings, the duty of the believer is to speak up with good manners. Engage in a debate or discussion with the other side but if the general tone of the discussion remains antagonistic to God's laws then the duty is to either change the subject or leave. Otherwise, the whole group is subject to God's displeasure. This also applies to group chats on social media.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must engage in a debate with friends on a spiritual topic and encourage each other to be Godly in our discussions.

Plan: I will select at least three of my friends and arrange a time to debate a spiritual topic during the holy month.

Al-Muhasaba: Last day of Ramadan

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I will pay £30 to charity.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ - الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ

Transliteration: Qad aflaha almu/minoon - Allatheena hum fee salatihimkhashiAAoon

Translation: Certainly, the faithful have attained salvation, those who are submissive in their prayers.

Quran Reference: Suratul Mo'iminoon, No. 23, Ayat 1-2

Main message of the passage: Taking a moment to ponder on the meaning of these two verses reveals the beauty in their meaning; Allah (swt) is declaring a joyful bliss for those who deserve the reward. He is guaranteeing success, not just to any believer but to those who, in their prayer, are submissive, humble and have a present heart and mind. And to all; those who understand the greatness, majesty and beauty of Allah (swt) and are God conscious. This true *khushu'* (also known as *khushu' al-iman*) is the reverence of the heart before Allah (swt) with humbleness, dignity and modesty as the heart trembles in the presence of the Almighty. Great emphasis is given to the prayer that is performed with the correct state of mind. One prayer with concentration can hold far more reward than hundreds of prayers without concentration. We need to learn new ways to always concentrate in our prayers.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must implement one new way of concentrating in my prayer during the remainder of the holy month of Ramadan.

Plan: I will search books or online on ways to concentrate in prayers and implement at least one method in my prayer.

Al-Muhasaba: Laylatul Qadr (night of 23rd Ramadan).

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I will read a book on concentration in prayer fully after the holy month.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ
الْقُلُوبُ

Transliteration: Allatheena amanoo watatma-innuquloobuhum bithikri Allahi ala bithikriAllahi tatma-innu alquloob

Translation: Those who have faith, and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah.' Look! The hearts find rest in Allah's remembrance!

Quran Reference: Suratul Ra'ad, No. 13, Aya 28

Main message of the passage: Remembering Allah (swt) does not merely mean uttering His name by tongue, but 'remembering' Him and His glory in our heart. The reward is that the heart will be assured and tranquil. In verse 8:2 Allah (swt) describes those believers who remember Him as having fearful hearts. Reflecting on both verses allows us to focus on the significance of remembering the Almighty (swt). Allah swt has instilled two seemingly opposing feelings in the believer's heart: fear and tranquillity. A true and humble believer's heart will tremble with fear due to his sins and shortcomings while simultaneously being tranquil in the face of conflicting desires and worldly pleasures.

Allah (swt) needs to be in our heart all the time. We need to be in constant remembrance of Him. We use the word remember as we are forgetful, and we need to constantly remind ourselves of His presence. We need to whisper His glorification at any opportunity we get. Being constantly aware of His presence can also in-fact prevent us from those very sins and shortcomings. Hence the more we remember Him, the more peace and tranquillity we will find in our hearts.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must recite at least one dua'a after prayers (ta'qibat) every day for the remainder of the holy month of Ramadan.

Plan: I will have the ta'qibat dua'a book ready in my prayer mat.

Al-Muhasaba: Laylatul Qadr (night of 23rd Ramadan).

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I will memorise all the ta'qibat dua'a.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ كَانَتْ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ كِتَابًا مَّوْقُوتًا

Transliteration: inna assalatakanat AAala almu'mineena kitaban mawqoota

Translation: The prayer is indeed a timed prescription for the faithful.

Quran Reference: Suratul Nisa, No. 4, Aya 103

Main message of the passage: This verse emphasises that the prayers must be performed at specific times and cannot be delayed. We are all aware that when it is the time for prayer, we must leave all worldly things and approach prayer. However, being aware is one thing and actually applying it is another. When the call for prayer comes and Allah (swt) is requesting His servant to meet Him, do we respond to this call or not?

One might question why prayer is enjoined on believers at stated times. There are several possible reasons for this. Firstly, one of the fundamental purposes of prayer is remembrance. The five obligatory prayers are spread throughout the day, so we remember Allah (swt) in the morning, afternoon and the evening. Secondly, prayer is the 'meeting time' with our Lord when we spend uninterrupted time communicating with Him. Allah (swt) has set times for these meetings. If you had a meeting with a colleague at work or a friend, would you like to be late? And were this meeting to be with Allah (swt), surely we would want to be on time for the most important of all meetings. Having specific times for our prayers helps us manage our time as it provides an order and a structure to our day.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must pray at least one of my main prayers exactly at the time of the prayer during the remainder of the holy month of Ramadan.

Plan: I will put a reminder on my phone for prayer times.

Al-Muhasaba: Last day of Ramadan

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I will recite 1000 times astaghfur Allah (O Allah forgive me).

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَلِكَ أَزْكَى
لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ

Transliteration: Qul lilmu'mineena yaghuddoo min absarihumwayahfathoo furoojahum thalika azkalahum inna Allaha khabeerun bima yasnaAAoon

Translation: Tell the believers to cast down their looks and to guard their private parts. That is more pure for them. Allah (swt) is indeed well aware of what they do.

Quran Reference: Suratul Nur, No. 24, Aya 30

Main message of the passage: This verse instructs the believing men to lower their gaze in the presence of women. The verse following this (24:31) instructs the believing women to do the same when they see the opposite gender. By refraining from looking at the opposite gender with lust, the believers are keeping their hearts pure. The believer's mind will become clear of any images that could disrupt their imagination.

We are faced with many instances and opportunities in the 21st century to see indecent images online and offline.

Studies have shown that online pornography use is on the rise, with a potential for addiction due to the "triple A" influence - Accessibility, Affordability, Anonymity. In addition to the spiritual effects of this, some believe watching pornography might have adverse effects on sexual development and sexual functioning, especially among the young population. It is imperative that we speak about these issues in an open and non-judgmental way to reach a solution to this ever-increasing problem.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must attempt to lower my gaze

Plan: I will make sure I will lower my gaze if I see the opposite sex with lust online, TV or in person.

Al-Muhasaba: Last day of Ramadan

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I will recite times astaghfur Allah (O Allah forgive me).

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

أَلَمْ يَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ يَقْبَلُ التَّوْبَةَ عَنْ عِبَادِهِ

Transliteration: Alif lam Meem ya'lamu anna'l-laha huwa yaqbalu'ttawbata 'an 'ibadih

Translation: Do they not know that it is Allah (swt) who accepts repentance of His servants?

Quran Reference: Suratul Tawba, No.9, Aya 104

Main message of the passage: Allah (swt) asks a question to human beings in this verse. Do they not know that it is He alone who accepts the repentance of His creatures? They do not need to go to anyone else. This verse is an encouragement to turn back to Allah (swt) after being away from Him because of disobedience, negligence, and distractions.

The word *tawba* means return or turning back to Allah. It can be described as a return to the purity of the soul after it has become polluted through sin and distanced itself from the Mercy of Allah (swt). It is also a return from the domain of the physical nature to the domain of spirituality and primordial nature (*fitrah*). The process of repentance occurs in the following way:

- 1) Allah (s) turns towards a human being and gives *tawfiq* for *tawba*. This is the turning of Allah (s) to His mercy and grace for the human being.
- 2) The human being does *tawba*. This is the turning of the human being away from sin towards Allah (s).
- 3) Allah turns towards him to accept the *tawba*. This is the turning of Allah (s) to acceptance.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must recite dua'a tawba of Sahifa Al-Sajadiya and then repent to Allah (swt) sincerely.

Plan: I will have dua'a tawba of Sahifa Al-Sajadiya ready with me on laylatul qadr.

Al-Muhasaba: Laylatul Qadr (night of 23rd Ramadan).

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I will recite all the dua'a in Sahifa Al-Sajadiya

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَتَهَجَّدْ بِهِ نَافِلَةً لَكَ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَبْعَثَكَ رَبُّكَ مَقَامًا
مَّحْمُودًا

Transliteration: Wamina allayli fatahajjad bihi nafilatanlaka AAasa an yabAAathaka rabbuka maqaman mahmooda

Translation: And keep vigil for a part of the night, as a superogatory (devotion) for you. It may be that your Lord will raise you to a praised position.

Quran Reference: Suratul Isra, No. 17, Aya 79

Main message of the passage: This verse instructs the Holy Prophet (saw) that it is obligatory on him to spend part of the night in worship and perform the night prayers (or salatul *layl*). Generally, it is recommended for all to pray all *nawafil* (superogatory) prayers, but special emphasis is given to the night prayers (*layl*, *shafa'ah* and *witr nawafil*; also known as *tahajjud* prayers). True believers follow the Prophet's path by waking up at night and worshipping Allah (swt) when others are asleep. It is a time when one can find peace and tranquillity in Allah's presence. Night prayers are the honour of a believer, as narrated in the following hadith from Imam al-Sadiq (as): "The believer's honour is night prayers, and his glory is refraining from (harming) people" (al-Saduq, Thawaab Al-a'amal, p. 41).

Sometimes it's difficult for us to pray the night prayers as it's just before we go to sleep. However, knowing the huge reward of these prayers, we can at least try to pray the *shafa'ah* and *witr* prayers.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must pray salatul layl at least once every week for the remainder of the holy month of Ramadan

Plan: I will pray salatul layl every Thursday night. I will try other nights as well.

Al-Muhasaba: Last day of Ramadan

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I will pay £10 to charity.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ - وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ

Transliteration: Inna anzalnahu fee laylatialqadr Wama adraka ma laylatualqadr

Translation: Indeed, We sent it [i.e., the Qur'an] down during the Night of Decree. And what will make you comprehend what the Night of Decree is?

Quran Reference: Suratul Qadr, No. 97, Aya 1-2

Main message of the passage: These verses highlight the magnificence of the night of decree, or *laylatul qadr*. To comprehend its true significance is difficult. The Quran itself describes it as better than a thousand months (97:3). *Qadr* in Arabic means measure and limit or value of something or destiny.

Reasons behind the naming of the night as *al-Qadr* include:

- 1) The annual destiny of every person will be determined by God.
- 2) If you stay awake on this night you will reach an elevated state.
- 3) It is a grand and high-value night.

To understand a little about the greatness of this night we must keep the following in mind:

- a) It is the night on which God's final message was revealed to humanity.
- b) It is the night on which the decree for the year is established.
- c) Good deeds are multiplied significantly on this night.

We must spend the night wisely, in complete devotion and supplication to the Almighty (swt). As our decree is decided, we should make a promise to Allah (swt) about anything that will help us get closer to Him in the next year. This could be anything from stopping a bad habit (e.g. smoking, backbiting, wasting time) to performing a good deed (e.g. volunteering, paying regular payments to charity, praying *salatul layl* regularly).

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must make a promise to Allah (swt) on doing something that will change me for the better (either stopping a bad habit or doing something good more often) on laylatul qadr and attempt to keep that promise for the next year.

Plan: I will make a list of things that I need to change for the better and strive to practice the change.

Al-Muhasaba: Laylatul Qadr (night of 23rd Ramadan).

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I will fast one day after Ramadan.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ

Transliteration: Afahasibtum annama khalaqnakumAAabathan waannakum ilayna la turjaAAoon

Translation: What! did you then think that We had created you in vain (purpose) and that you shall not be returned to Us?

Quran Reference: Suratul Mu'iminun, No. 23, Aya 115

Main message of the passage: This verse asks a rhetorical question: Do you think We (Allah) created you with no purpose in life and you will not come back to us? Indeed Allah has created us with a purpose. Let us explain the cycle of our purpose: We worship Allah (swt) so that our souls mature and develop spiritually. Worship includes prayers, fasting, reading the Holy Qur'an, reciting dua'a, helping others, spiritual introspection etc. Once our souls develop spirituality, we get to know Allah (swt), know His attributes and recognise and comprehend His attributes that he has instilled in us. Once we get to know Him, we will experience the incredible feeling of loving Him. This is the ultimate goal and purpose. Once we experience the feeling of loving Him, we will want to worship Him more and the cycle starts again. This truly mesmerising and spiritual feeling of loving God only comes if we discipline and mature the soul. When we undergo the experience of loving God we will finally find comfort and contentment in our hearts. May Allah (swt) help us to experience the euphoric feeling of loving Him.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must try spending at least one hour reflecting on my purpose in life in the remainder of the holy month.

Plan: I will read or watch online lectures on the purpose of life in Islam.

Al-Muhasaba: Last day of Ramadan

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I recite 1000 times astaghfur Allah (O Allah forgive me).

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

ثُمَّ لَأَتِيَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ وَعَنْ أَيْمَانِهِمْ وَعَنْ شَمَائِلِهِمْ وَلَا تَجِدُ أَكْثَرَهُمْ شَاكِرِينَ

Transliteration: Thumma laatiyannahum min bayniaydeehim wamin khalfihim waAAan aymanihim waAAan shama-ilihimwala tajidu aktharahum shakireen

Translation: Then I will certainly come to them from before them and from behind them, and from their right-hand side and from their left-hand side; and Thou shalt not find most of them grateful.

Quran Reference: Surat Muhammed, No.7, Aya 17

Main message of the passage: After promising to mislead the sons of Adam in the previous verse, the shaytan describes here his strategy for how he will execute this. He will:

- 1) Attack from the front (i.e. the most straightforward way) where he will make the hereafter insignificant for them.
- 2) Attack from behind (i.e. while they are not noticing) and make them accumulate wealth and strike the fear of becoming poor so they save for the children and not give to any other causes.
- 3) Attack from the right (i.e. the direction of the true understanding of God) and will corrupt their understanding of religion through the use of religion itself to create confusion and doubt.
- 4) Attack from the left (i.e. the direction of sinning) and will make lust and desires overcome their judgments.

It is imperative that the believer is aware of the shaytan's plans and ensure that he does not succeed in misleading him/her.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must recite 'Aootho bilAllahi min AlShaytaniAl Rajeem' quietly before I recite 'BismiAllah Ar-Rahman Ar-Rahim' in my prayers.

Plan: I will practice the recitation during and outside the daily prayers.

Al-Muhasaba: Last day of Ramadan

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I must recite 100 times 'Aootho bilAllahi min AlShaytaniAl Rajeem'.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

وَلْيَعْفُوا وَلْيَصْفَحُوا أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ
أَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

Transliteration: Walya'fu walyasfahu, ala tuhibbuna an yaghfirallahu lakum, wallahu ghafurun rahim

Translation: And they should excuse and forbear. Do you not love that Allah should forgive you? Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful.

Quran Reference: Suratul Nur, No.24, Aya 22

Main message of the passage: In this verse Allah (swt) links the forgiveness of human beings to His own. He says forgive others; do you not want that I should forgive you? All believers want to achieve closeness to Allah through His forgiveness. In turn, we should also strive to possess the trait of forgiveness. Forgiving others and overlooking the wrong they have done is to set the ground for Allah (swt) forgiving us. In the verse Allah (swt) names two of His qualities – the Forgiving, the Merciful. He has instilled these qualities in us, inviting us to follow those qualities and perhaps assuring us that one who forgives others will deserve Divine Forgiveness and Mercy. This verse tells us that the Almighty (swt), with all His power and greatness and the obedience due to Him, still forgives. Why is it that we lowly human beings hang on to the wrongs of others and refuse to forgive? The holy month of Ramadan is a chance for us to start and forgive those who've wronged us.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must forgive at least one person who has wronged me.

Plan: I will make a list of people who have wronged me and try to forgive each one.

Al-Muhasaba: Night of 27th Ramadan

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I will fast one extra day after Ramadan.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

كُلُوا مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَاعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا

Transliteration: Kulu minat-tayyibati wa-'malu saliha

Translation: Eat from the good foods and act righteously.

Quran Reference: Suratul Mu'iminun, No.23, Aya 51

Main message of the passage: This verse links pure food to good deeds. What we eat impacts our soul. It affects how we think and how we behave, how we connect to God, and how we treat others around us. The word *tayyibat* in the above verse and other verses (for e.g., 20:81) refer to food that is wholesome, pure and good. It is food that is according to what God has ordained and what His messengers have recommended. Such food creates a lightness in the stomach. It produces an inner illumination that inclines the person towards virtue and good deeds. Food that is impure and unwholesome has the opposite effect. It creates a heaviness and hardness, leading to spiritual apathy.

The holy month of Ramadan is the month where we can reflect and examine our diet. Do we break our fast with wholesome nutritional foods or greasy and fatty foods? We must bear in mind that good physical health also means good spiritual health. Therefore, we need to be mindful and conscious of what we are eating.

Spiritual Introspection

AI-Musharata: I must be mindful of what I am eating by chewing my food at least 20 times.

Plan: I will ask people around me to remind me of my AI-Musharata when I am eating.

AI-Muhasaba: Last day of Ramadan

AI-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the AI-Musharata, I will fast one extra day after Ramadan.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

وَلَا تُبْذِرْ تَبْذِيرًا - إِنَّ الْمُبْذِرِينَ كَانُوا إِخْوَانَ الشَّيْطَانِ وَكَانَ
الشَّيْطَانُ لِرَبِّهِ كَفُورًا

Transliteration: Wala tubadhdhir tabdhira Inna almubaththireena
kanooikhwana ashshayateeni wakana ashshaytanulirabbihi kafoora

Translation: And do not squander wastefully. Indeed, the wasteful are brothers
of the devils, and ever has Satan been to his Lord ungrateful.

Quran Reference: Suratul Isra No.17, Aya 26

Main message of the passage: This verse clearly instructs the believers not to be extravagant, otherwise they are the brothers of the *Shaytan*. Extravagance is not just in eating, drinking, or spending. The extravagance condemned in Islam goes beyond material deeds. Anything that is over the limits of appropriateness, whether to do with the body, the soul, or the heart, is extravagance. Imam Ali (a) in describing the hypocrites says they are extravagant and commit excess in passing judgement (Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 194).

It is sometimes difficult to discern if we are being extravagant or not. If we spend within our means, when is it that we are being extravagant? We should use our intellect and examine the social norm to answer this question. Perhaps using more water than necessary while washing is extravagant. Perhaps spending money on non-essential items and clothes (especially now as it is very easy to buy online) is extravagant. Perhaps buying a large house that is disproportionate to the size of my family is extravagant. Extravagance can lead to the displeasure of Allah, reduce barakah and blessings in life, invite poverty and generally hold many negative consequences. Let us discipline ourselves to be balanced in life and choose the middle path.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must use a minimal amount of water when I do my ghusl washing and wudu (ablution).

Plan: I will put a sign in my bathroom to remind me to use minimal amount of water.

Al-Muhasaba: Last day of Ramadan

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I will pay £30 for charity.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَبِذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينِ وَالْجَارِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْجَارِ الْجُنُبِ وَالصَّاحِبِ بِالْجَنبِ

Transliteration: Wabil-walidayni iHsana wabidhil-qurba walyatama walmasakini waljari dhilqurba wajaril-junub

Translation: And do good to parents, the relatives, the orphans, the needy, the near neighbour and the distant neighbour.

Quran Reference: Suratul Nisa, No. 4, Aya 36

Main message of the passage: The verse above identifies certain groups of people who have rights over the believer. Among them is the neighbour. Allah specifies two types of neighbours: the near one and the distant one. Distance could be physical distance, with some homes being close by and others being a little further away. This is meant to remind people that even people whose homes are a little distant are still considered neighbours. Islam considers forty homes around a home, in all four directions, as being neighbours. The distance could also mean distance in faith, beliefs or blood relation. Neighbours who are close are those from the same faith, while the distant ones are those belonging to other faiths. It could also mean those not related but are neighbours. They also have rights, and a believer must be careful of the duties towards them. Neighbours can play an important role in life. They can make it more pleasant or unpleasant. When neighbours fulfil the rights of each other, society is strengthened and goodness and virtue spreads. It is possible for neighbours to have a big influence on the quality of one's life.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must speak to 5 of my neighbours and check if they need any help. I will regularly check up on them.

Plan: I will list the address of 5 neighbours I want to check up on.

Al-Muhasaba: Last day of Ramadan

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I will run 5k miles.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

وَتَرَى كُلَّ أُمَّةٍ جَاثِيَةً كُلُّ أُمَّةٍ تُدْعَى إِلَى كِتَابِهَا الْيَوْمَ تُجْزَوْنَ مَا
كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

Transliteration: Watara kulla ommatin jathiyatankullu ommatin tudAAa ila kitabihaalyawma tujzawna ma kuntum taAAamaloon

Translation: And you shall see every community kneeling down; every community shall be called to its book: today you shall be rewarded for what you did.

Quran Reference: Suratul Jathiya, No. 45, Aya 28

Main message of the passage: This verse highlights a very important part of the assessment process on the Day of Judgment. This part is the collective community assessment. Exegetists say that the human shall have two books in the hereafter: One for his/her own deeds and the other is the community book. The latter will contain the good and bad deeds committed by the community. The verse describes the court-like environment where the people will be sitting on their knees waiting for the verdict.

It is every believer's duty to contribute to the development of the community. This could be through volunteering to help in the local mosque, helping those in need in the community or starting your own community initiative. We cannot leave community work to a few as everyone in the community will be asked about what they provided to the community. Many say they do not have the time to give to the community. One's schedule is usually filled with one's priorities. We need to add community work as a priority in our lives. Only when we are able to give time to community work, will we able to fill the community book with good deeds in the Hereafter.

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must prioritise community work in my daily schedule.

Plan: I will make a list the areas of community work I am interested in and make a start on implementing the work.

Al-Muhasaba: Last day of Ramadan.

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I will provide 20 hours of my time to community work for the remainder of the year.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

يَرْفَعِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ

Transliteration: Yarfa'i-llahul-ladhina amanu minkum walladhina utul-'ilma darajat

Translation: Allah will raise in rank those of you who have faith and those who have been given knowledge.

Quran Reference: Suratul Mujadilah, No 58, Aya 11

Main message of the passage: This verse tells us that human beings ascend in ranks through two qualities – faith and knowledge. Sincere faith in Allah (swt) is the foundation of all the virtues of a believer – it is the root from which stem beautiful thoughts and actions. Knowledge is an outstanding quality of the believer. The people with knowledge cannot be compared to any other groups of people. Allah (swt) says: Say, are those who know equal to those who do not know?' Only those who possess intellect take admonition (Q 39:9). Seeking knowledge is one of the most noble ways of spending time. There are several ways a believer can seek knowledge. Here are some ideas you could try:

- 1) Create a book club with family and friends.
- 2) Enrol for online courses
- 3) List a few Islamic topics of interest to you and do research on them.
- 4) Discuss/debate topics with family and friends.
- 5) Watch lectures online.

Seeking knowledge has also been shown to help prevent diseases like dementia in the future. So, what is stopping you?

Spiritual Introspection

Al-Musharata: I must give half an hour every day for seeking knowledge.

Plan: I will choose one book to read after Ramadan.

Al-Muhasaba: Eid Al-Fitr day.

Al-Muaqaba: If I don't manage to achieve the Al-Musharata, I will pay £50 to charity.

My spiritual experience today

- I gained no spiritual growth today (0 points)
- I gained a little spiritual growth today (1 point)
- I gained some spiritual growth today (3 points)
- I gained a lot of spiritual growth today (4 points)
- Total points so far

Notes

Table 1

Ramadan Day	Condition	Condition Met (Yes/No)	Self Discipline required? (Yes/No)
1	I must not complain about my fast		
2	I must recite 'La ilaha ila Allah' every morning when I wake up in the Month of Ramadan.		
3	I must reflect on 5 of God's creation in the Holy month of Ramadan		
4	I must listen to at least 10 minutes of the Holy Qur'an every day in the Holy month.		
5	I must reach out to at least one friend that I have not spoken to for a while		
6	I must not raise my voice on anyone		
7	I must not forward any material I have no information or knowledge about		
8	I will must always try to think good of people, regardless of their action		
9	I must recite and contemplate one tasbih Al-Zahra (as) after every prayer		
10	I must pay amount to the orphans every Thursday night		
11	I must write one thing I am grateful for everyday for the remainder of the Holy month of Ramadan (gratitude journal)		
12	I must contemplate on one verse of the Holy Qur'an every week for the remainder of the holy month of Ramadan		
13	I must make dua'a for all my family and friends during the holy month. I must mention them by name		
14	I must recite the dua'a of the people of the cave at least once a day in my qunoot during prayer for the remainder of during the holy month		
15	I must engage in a debate with friends on a spiritual topic and encourage each other to be Godly in our discussions.		
16	I must practice one way of concentrating in my prayer for the remainder of the holy month of Ramadan.		
17	I must recite at least one dua'a after prayers (ta'qibat) every day for the remainder of the holy month of Ramadan		
18	I must pray at least one of my main prayers exactly at the time of the prayer		
19	I must attempt to lower my gaze		
20	I must recite dua'a tawba of Sahifa Al-Sajadiya		

Ramadan Day	Condition	Condition Met (Yes/No)	Self Discipline required? (Yes/No)
20	I must recite dua'a tawba of Sahifa Al-Sajadiya		
21	I must pray salatul layl at least once every week		
22	I must make a promise to Allah (swt) to do something that will change me for the better (either stopping a bad habit or doing something good more often) on laylatul qadr and attempt to keep that promise for the next year		
23	I must try spending one hour a week reflecting on my purpose in life		
24	I must recite 'Aootho bilAllahi min AlShaytaniAl Rajeem' quietly before I recite 'BismiAllah Ar-Rahman Ar-Rahim' in my prayers		
25	I must forgive at least one person who has wronged me		
26	I must be mindful of what I am eating by chewing my food 20 times		
27	I must use a minimal amount of water when I do my ghusl washing and wudu (ablution).		
28	I must speak to 5 of my neighbours and check if they need any help. I will regularly check up on them		
29	I must prioritise community work in my daily schedule		
30	I must give half an hour every day for seeking knowledge		

Table 2

Ramadan Day	Lesson	Spirituality score
1	Comprehend the Spirit of Fasting	
2	Be Godly	
3	Appreciate Allah's creation	
4	Listen more often to the Holy Qur'an	
5	Choose your friends wisely	
6	Speak in a soft way	
7	Don't forward material that you have no knowledge about	
8	Remove all hatred from your heart	
9	Increase your tasbih	
10	Practice empathy	
11	Practice gratitude	
12	Believe that the Holy Qur'an is the ultimate source of true knowledge	
13	Have hope while making dua'a	
14	Ask Allah swt to show you the right path	
15	Don't associate yourself with people who mock others	
16	Concentrate in your prayers	
17	Make your heart tremble in the Remembrance of God	
18	Pray on time	
19	Lower your gaze	
20	Turn back to Allah through repentance	
21	Pray Salatul Layl	
22	Make a promise on Laylatul Qadr	
23	Comprehend your purpose in life	
24	Know the Shaytan's moves	
25	Forgive those who have wronged you	
26	Eat the food that will help your soul	
27	Avoid Extravagance	
28	Care for your neighbours	
29	Work for your community	
30	Seek knowledge	
Total		

Points Scale:

1-10: Little spiritual growth.

11-20: Moderate spiritual growth.

21-30: High spiritual growth.