

# You CAN do it!!!

## Make this Ramadan the Month of "Change"..Are You Ready for it???

"Change" is in vogue today. "Change" is being chanted by the Presidents to rally up public support; "Change" is being demanded by the masses suffering due to skyrocketing fuel and commodity prices; "Change", a drastic one indeed, is what we are witnessing with awe in the global weather patterns.

For Muslims, Ramadan is the prime time for change. This month dramatically alters our routines and schedules. From tight sleep schedules, to hunger for extended hours, to reduction in consumption of junk foods, to a technology diet; to withdrawal from caffeine addiction, to lengthy standing in prayers at night, to extensive listening to the Quran. ***What a change indeed!***

### Beyond Routines and Rituals

The real change, however, Ramadan demands of us is the internal change – a change that positively transforms our lifestyle, character, attitudes, conversations, and habits. Allah has described this change in the month of Ramadan as follows: ***"O you who believe, fasting has been ordained on you as it was decreed upon those before you so that you may adopt Taqwa"*** (Taqwa is Allah consciousness )" (Quran 2:183)

### Slavery to Ramadan?

If our change is limited to outer physical practices only, we become slaves to Ramadan, instead of being servants to Ar-Rahman (Allah, the Merciful).

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has warned us about those who don't fast from bad behaviour:

***"Allah has no interest in any person's abstention from eating and drinking, if that person does not give up lying and dishonest actions" (Hadith Sahih al-Bukhari)***

### Ramadan Resolutions

Every Ramadan we make resolutions and tell ourselves: "This Ramadan will be different. I'm going to change my \_\_\_\_\_ habit." "I will give up .....", "I will take my practice of Islam to the next level". But how many of us are really able to follow through? Plenty of good intentions, many amazing wishes, but sadly enough, life goes on as usual the morning of Eid.

Ask yourself, how is my fasting benefitting my spiritual connection with Allah? How is my extensive worship in Ramadan helping me discipline my tongue (taste and speech), eyes, ears, and habits?

Are you ready to take that first step to transform your bad habits into good ones?

### **Ways to Kick Bad Habits**

Few things are more demanding than eliminating bad habits, since they are part of our daily routines and personality. It takes days of patience and practice to break old habits.

However, the good news is, Ramadan offers a perfect and natural environment for moral training. Interestingly, researches from "positive psychology" (scientific study of successful people) have repeatedly shown it takes between 30 to 40 days to kick a bad habit and develop a new one.

In addition to the physical discipline during the month of Ramadan, the increased spiritual exercise and connection with Allah, can transform your habits for life.

### ***Try these proven techniques for a successful positive change in your habits during Ramadan and beyond!***

**1. Acknowledge and Identify your bad habits:** First step is to admit you need to change. If you are in a state of denial, you won't recognize that you have a bad habit to change.

**2. Pick a habit for this month:** Prioritize your bad habits and focus on one for this month. If you are committed to changing at least one habit, you will see remarkable results, Allah-willing.

**3. Realize that it's in us to change:** Don't believe the old saying, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." You can break a bad habit if you really want to. No one else can change your habits, if you don't want to.

**4. Remember, Allah loves those who commit mistakes and repent:** Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

***"By Him in Whose Hand is my life, if you were not to commit sin, Allah would sweep you out of existence and He would replace (you by) those people who would commit sin and seek forgiveness from Allah, and He would have pardoned them." (Hadith-Sahih Muslim)***

**5. Intention & Plan to change:** ***"If you fail to plan, you plan to fail."*** A healthy process of change in character requires a gradual pace, which entails planning. Develop concrete milestones to measure your progress.

**6. Replace a bad habit with a good one:** Completely eliminating a habit is more challenging than replacing it with a more productive habit.

Moreover, it's crucial to replace the lost natural needs, such as the need to socialize and to be entertained with something healthy and pure.

For instance, it's easier to replace or balance your addiction to TV with a physical workout or reading Qur'an, than to suddenly remove the TV from your life without a substitute. Interestingly, Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), the greatest 'psychologist' of humanity, illustrated this principle in these words:

***"Fear Allah wherever you may be; follow up an evil deed with a good one which will wipe (the former) out, and behave good-naturedly towards people." (Hadith At-Tirmidhi)***

**7. Change your Environment:** Resist the negative peer pressure by finding a better company of friends. Collective action to change is very powerful. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) explained this peer pressure effect with this analogy:

***"A good friend and a bad friend are like a perfume-seller and a blacksmith: The perfume-seller might give you some perfume as a gift, or you might buy some from him, or at least you might smell its fragrance. As for the blacksmith, he might singe your clothes, and at the very least you will breathe in the fumes of the furnace." (Hadith Sahih al-Bukhari & Muslim)***

**8. Exercise:** Spiritual exercise is important for lasting change. You may not realize that by exerting your yourself in spiritual exercises like the reading of Quran and Hadith, fasting, giving charity, Zikr(remembering Allah) etc helps in eliminating a number of bad habits. Through the spiritual light of doing noble deeds evil ones will gradually be eradicated from your life.

Allah says : **"Indeed, Salah(prayer) restrains from shameful and unjust deeds" (Quran:29:45)**. A person complained to The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) about someone who read salaah and also committed theft . The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said **"His salaah will very soon wean him off that sin."** This shows that the **evil** habits can be got rid of by adhering to good practises. The doing of good deeds such as remembering Allah cleanses the heart. A clean heart encourages a person to do good deeds and refrains one from evil habits!

Moreover, exercising your will power (struggle to fight temptations) for this month helps you kick all kinds of bad habits and form new good ones. Willpower is like a muscle; the more you exercise it, the more you strengthen it.

**9. Think of yourself as a changed, different, new person.** This simple psychological shift in your thinking about your own image can do wonders. Tell yourself, "I can't continue this ill-behaviour. I am better than that. I am stronger. I am wiser."

**10. Reward success:** The most fundamental law in all of psychology is the "law of effect." It simply states that actions followed by rewards are strengthened and likely to recur. Unfortunately, studies show that people rarely use this technique when trying to change personal habits.

Setting up formal or informal rewards for success greatly increases your chances of transforming bad habits into good ones, and is far more effective than punishing yourself for bad habits or setbacks. As Muslims we should also remember that the ultimate reward is Allah's Pleasure and Paradise in the Hereafter.

**11. Get help:** Tell someone about your effort to change if it helps. He or she may keep you on track and may offer some good advice. Read books that will encourage you to do virtuous actions. Join programs in your local Mosque. Ladies should endeavour to join their local Taalim. There are good and sincere people who are ready to assist. We are not an island- We are an Ummah!

**12. Boost your spiritual immune system:** By fasting, doing good actions, spending time in the Masjid in I'tikaaf (seclusion) or going in the Path of Allah will boost your Imaan (faith) which will provide you with internal strength to overcome temptations to reverting to old bad habits.

**13. Remind yourself of Death and Hereafter often: "*Remember often the terminator (or destroyer) of all the pleasures (i.e. death),*"** The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) once stated. (Hadith-At-Tirmidhi)

**14. Resolve to continue on and follow up:** Giving up bad habits or learning good habits requires regular maintenance and determination. It is a long, ongoing process, also known as "Tazkiyyah" in Islamic terminology. It's more difficult than the first few steps of change. ("How many times have I dieted, for example, only to gain the weight back?"). So ensure that you follow up. Connect yourself to a good Allah-Fearing Aalim (Islamic Scholar) and make a habit of spending time in the Path of Allah.

**15. Develop a relapse strategy:** How do you ensure not to return to your bad habit you are trying to change? Some people donate money to a good cause every time they return to sinning or a bad habit. This reminds them of the 'cost' of going back to old bad habits. Others try physically demanding acts to deter them from reverting to old ways. For example that if you do \_\_\_ act than you will keep three fast or pay so much sadaqah (charity) etc

**16. Ask Allah for Help: MOST IMPORTANT!**-Make Asking for Allah's Help an integral part of the overall change process. Ask for Allah's Help before, during and after every attempt at kicking a bad habit. Do so sincerely, even begging and crying, like a child does when he or she really wants something. Allah is Ever-Willing to Help and to Respond to our needs, but it is us who must take the first step towards Him. If we walk towards Allah, He will run unto us. Indeed Allah will NEVER disappoint us!

