



For some people it's a shiny new gadget. For others, clothes. For me it's cake. At first you may laugh, but quantifying a person's enjoyment of something permissible like this will only lead you to realise how subjective the matter is. Cake forms a significant portion (both literally and metaphorically) of my day-to-day business and I'm led to believe (mainly by you girls out there!) that I'm not alone. When other people are partaking in casual conversation over coffee, I'm considering the merits of the crumb on the cake that's being served. Whether it's comparing recipes for the same cake, baking with a special friend on a rainy afternoon or going for afternoon tea, thoughts, I'm afraid to say, seem to return to cake.

We usually know what makes us tick. The things that our *nafs* (self) loves the most –be it money, food or sleep. Great scholars and pious people of the past would recognise the things that they yearned for and many among the true Sufis would actively work to harness these desires even though such things were

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I. For some it might be pears while others loved roast meat, but they would all unite in understanding that such a strong wish for something presented an opportunity to strengthen their resolve and determination, to alleviate laziness and to detach themselves from this *duny*

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(world). Many would be rewarded for such sacrifice with attaining the higher levels of fear and humility - they abstained from the transient pleasures of this world, hoping for something far greater – piety and sincerity to All

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During Ramadan, we are encouraged to reach higher levels of spirituality and piety through the vehicle of self sacrifice. The matters we abstain from during the day would normally be h

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I at other times, but in this holy month we challenge ourselves to be patient for the sake of All

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h. How special are those prayers and

tasbeehs

with an empty stomach. We comprehend how self-restraint tames one's

nafs

over a longer period of time.

During the rest of the year don't forget that our stomach is not a vessel to be filled to the brim, as we know from the Hadith. Furthermore, a human only needs a few bites of food to stave off hunger and if they are to eat more, then a third of the stomach for food, a third for water and a third for easy breathing. That means re-assessing hourly top ups at the all-you-can-eat buffet in one's kitchen. Try to distract yourself from food and even when you feel hungry, just push yourself that bit further. Appreciate the relief from hunger you can feel from just five almonds. Instead of two toasts for breakfast, how about just one and then later how about cutting down to a half? Use the stories of the Companions who at times shared a date between them to motivate you.

In the story of Prophet Ibrahim and his son, peace be upon them, there is a great example for us. One understands how total reliance on Allah alone allows us to fulfil our obligations. Ibrahim [^]*alayhis salaam*

was ordered to slaughter his son Ism

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n how obedient both were during this event. When they arrived at a certain point they were informed by an Angel that they had carried out the order of Allah and they were to slaughter a ram as a sacrifice instead. Now, every year in preparation for the ^

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, young children are encouraged to get attached to the animal that is to be slaughtered - to help look after it and to care for it. In this way we learn the importance of sacrificing that which we love to strengthen our

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(belief) and to comprehend from a young age that All
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h is the Owner of everything and that we were created to be ordered to worship All
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h alone. If we fulfil that purpose then we have succeeded by the Grace of All
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I am not yet someone who can be attributed with *zuhd* (desiring little from this life out of preoccupation with the Hereafter), but this does not mean we don't aim for the highest levels we can reach every day. Try simplifying your spending, your clothing and your indulgences. Recently I decided to not have cake in the house for two months to test myself. Was it hard? Yes, but once you work that reflex of telling yourself 'no' it becomes easier to perform your obligations, to refrain from sin and to insh
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h become among those who override tiredness and pray at night, who spend money in charity without fear and who eat little and talk little, in spite of what the self leans towards.