



SAli

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Preface

This project started with the intention that I would fast every day (allowed) during the month of Ramadan, write about my experiences, and compile them into something. When I began I knew this wasn't entirely possible, with a move, a heat wave in the middle of the summer, and the stress of doing it alone, it seemed like a long shot to think I would really stick to it. But I tried nonetheless, and I didn't prove myself wrong or anything so romantic. In fact, I did worse than I thought I would. But sometimes, that's just how things go.

Depending on who you ask, Ramadan can be about many things, but the thing I grew up most identifying with is the struggle for self-control. Starting at eight years old, I fasted every year because it was expected of me. When I was no longer under my parent's roof, I didn't fast and at first it felt strange, like I was doing something wrong. Then it felt good, because I knew it was a choice I made on my own. I wanted to return to my roots, so to speak, and see what happened.

This is an exploration of just that. What happened?

One

I'm writing this on the second day of fasting. I had the time to write yesterday, but sometimes it feels like such a large thing—like it had to actually be something, rather than just seeing how it goes—and it makes it hard to do anything at all. When I think about most things, that's pretty much exactly how it feels. Too big, too time consuming, too difficult, too grand of a project for someone like me. Do I know enough about anything to have something to say about it?

On days like today, sunny, warm, restful, and utterly empty, I tend to hate myself. Days off, for me, mean going from spending time doing something I don't want to do (work) to spending time with someone I don't really want to spend time with (myself).

“no one warns you about the
amount of mourning in growth.”

Té V. Smith

Two

Last night, I broke my fast with a sip of beer at a bar for a friend's birthday. Didn't I just spend the last day berating myself about the fact that I'm never prepared?

In terms of how well I handle myself, I've only regressed in the last ~2 years since I've lived on my own. I've always had a superiority complex about my self-control, but now I'm realizing how much that had to do with my surroundings. When I was living with my family, the act of self-control (or restriction, as I'm now coming to think of it) was always the “right” thing to do. No one ever encouraged me to do what felt better or what made me happy. In a lot of ways, forging my own path as an adult has meant learning how to prioritize ‘happy’. The next step will be learning how to balance both.

In the same way that I have progressed, now I need to regress.

I don't want to sleep away these thirty days. I don't know what I want to come out of this, and that only makes it harder to do. I did not tell mama I was fasting, so she thinks she's doing it alone. I guess she is, but it would be nice if she didn't feel that way.

Three

I didn't fast today. I guess I made that decision yesterday, so it's not a surprise. It's ninety-four degrees today. I thought it would be too hard to fast, and convinced myself I would be productive today and fasting would impede on that. Guess what?

I feel disappointed in myself in so many different ways. What ever happened to the days where I felt like I could do things? Where I made big plans? Where I didn't need to change the subject in my own head whenever I thought about myself?

I used to feel like I made so much progress in myself and now all of the good and the bad seem to blur together.

One step at a time, one step at a time.

Three (extension)

You know how people always ask if fasting is hard and you're like well, yeah? Duh? I'm super hungry and tired and my head feels like a balloon why would this be easy, that's not even the point?

I didn't fast last Ramadan. That was my first Ramadan not living at home, and I felt like I had the choice. Not fasting was the choice I made.

This time around, I wanted to do it. Not because I felt like I had to, because that's always why I had done it, but because I wanted to see if I could even when there was no pressure to do so. No one knows if I break fast, no one even knows I'm fasting, to be honest, no one really cares.

I failed pretty badly today on a lot of fronts. And yesterday, and the day before. Probably the last two years, if I'm being really honest with myself. I spent a lot of the day hating myself, and trying to convince myself it wasn't warranted but that doesn't quite work because I'm coming at myself from both angles.

I don't know why I'm doing this. I'm not religious. I don't believe in anything. I don't believe in myself.

Maybe that's it right there.

“When the time comes for you to make a change, to grow, to do your life in a different way, the universe will make you so uncomfortable, so unhappy, you will eventually have no choice. If you insist on staying in a place you no longer belong in, if you do not grow the courage to do what is necessary to propel yourself forward, you will suffer the consequences, whatever they may be.”

Iyanla Vanzant

Four

It's not quite as hot as it was yesterday. It's actually kind of nice out. I keep reminding myself that it's never too late to do what I want to do, but I'm not really sure what exactly I'm talking about. Last night me and Daniel went for a walk to grab him some coffee for the night I got to dip my feet in the water fountain for a bit, and it was nice to feel something new.

I'm not fasting today. I had a big fruit smoothie for breakfast. I wasn't going to write about it at first, but it just occurred to me that there's no reason not to. I spend so much time trying to be the best version of myself that it doesn't leave much or any room at all to just exist.

The term “pathological unhappiness” has been swirling around in my mind for the past couple days. I don't know if that's even a word or thing at all, but nonetheless, I've been thinking it. I could always be better, so I never quite settle into what I am. I don't remember the last time I felt at peace with myself. Clearly, I have a lot of work to do.

I haven't decided if I'll be fasting every day or not. I kind of like the idea of taking it one at a time. I'm starting to think that's the way I should take all things.

Five/Six

I wish I would have wrote on these days. I thought about it, about how I knew I would think back afterwards and wish that I had done more. I always do.

I didn't fast these days either. So, at this point, I've not fasted more days than I have.

I'm writing this with my face stuffed in a pillow, hunched over a table.

Nine

I've been day dreaming a lot these past few days. I used to use daydreams as a coping mechanism, and I would look forward to any empty time (classes, bus rides, etc.) so I could follow up on my imaginary life, which was always infinitely better than my real life. Something like a remedy for restlessness.

Something about falling in love with someone who speaks my language, something about not having to translate the words of a song about heartbreak when they come off of my native tongue.

Ten

In one week today, things are changing. I know things won't really be the same for me and him, but I think it's the push we both need to do what we need to do. I can't rely on others for everything.

Why should I live always, in some manner, in a way which restricts me and the things I want. Why does anyone live like this? What's the point?

I'm afraid of a lot of things, but I think of the things that scares me the most when I think about my life is the idea of going through it relying on other people to keep me afloat. Tell me what to do, what not to do. Be there for me to restrict myself for, so I never have to make any decisions on my own. It's not worth going through my life feeling like this. Like I'm claustrophobic, despite the enormity of the world.

Twelve

My mind is functioning more like a to-do list than poetry or prose. I have so many things to do before I move, people to say bye to, things to get sorted out in my head. I need to remind myself to stop wishing I had more time, because I know that wouldn't have helped. Look at all the time I've had and look how little I've done with it. Not just this month, every month. Every year.

Maybe this is the change I need to set other changes in motion.

Reminder to my present self:

Do favors for your future self. Drink more water, eat more fruits. Wake up early, take walks. Sit by yourself and do the things you enjoy without guilt, without a to-do list forming in your mind for later. Be gentle with yourself, because you've convinced yourself for so long that what you need is tough love, but that's not the truth and it never has been. What you need is to let yourself breathe. Nothing is as serious as you feel like it is in that moment. Nothing. All convincing otherwise is nonsense.

Be free, not only from yourself but from others as well. Let no one have you convinced that you need them.

You are a feather in the wind, never let anyone tie a rope around your neck and call you jewelry.

Eighteen

Better things ahead. There has to be.

Twenty-One

There's a certain point you reach where you are no longer learning at the same pace you used to learn.

Twenty-Two

I've been in this city for about a week at this point, but I'm not sure this is where I'll stay. I came here because my sister is here, but staying with her has reminded me how different of a person I feel like around my family. It's alienating to me to spend too much time around any of them. This weighs heavily on me. I feel rootless.

In a month or so, D. will be off to the opposite side of the country. I've separated myself from my family, friends, and now my partner. I will really be alone, and I'm both terrified and excited. Terrified because I've never been so weightless, and excited for the same reason.

I've always felt so much shame about my mental illness. I don't have words for what goes on inside my head, and it feels weird to even acknowledge it. At this point it's just so much to care about anything at all. I feel the weight of that in every social situation. I feel myself slowly evaporating into the air. Like being submerged in water.

I think I'll ride this city out, and then be onto the next. Maybe the trick is to go by myself next time. I suppose by then I'll have no choice.



