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Fasting helps nurture adversity intelligence



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comments 0



IN the enthusiasm to create and share abundance, there is the commercialisation of almost everything. There is the commercialisation of love, life and of death.

While funeral parlours provide service for the last rites and appropriate dignity in the final journey of cremation or burial, there are many aspects of the processes which have been commercialised. These include embalming, cleansing, prayers, transport and, discreetly or indiscreetly, advertisement for after service care of cemetery lots or urns.

Increasingly, there is the commercialisation of religion.

One aspect of the commercialisation is making celebrities of religious figures or commercialised festivities of religious events and functions.

Before people are aware, their behaviours and behaviour patterns are shaped and moulded by the behaviour modifiers. The senses of sorrow or joy can be heightened or dulled and blunted by the behaviour modifiers.

Behaviour modifications do not just happen on the couches of psychiatrists, in research laboratories, or in mental hospitals or in classrooms but can also happen in political rallies, talk shows, television screens and monitors and other events aimed at information sharing, educating or indoctrinating.

Fasting in Islam or Christianity or Hinduism or other faiths, whether religious or meditative, is always about consciousness, discipline, resilience and capacity to face adversities.

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The lifestyle of abstinence for a lifetime or for a specified period, refraining from sensual pleasures or worldly pursuits, is an aspect of self-discipline which provides many returns in terms of health, social responsibility, and personal conscience.

The practices of asceticism are regarded as virtuous in the pursuit of physical and metaphysical health.

The Greeks, Japanese, Sufis, Christians, Jains and Buddhists are all familiar with the austere life not just as religious obligation but also as the pursuit of spiritual goals. One obligation of understanding and experiencing adversity as strength is the collective religious experience of fasting by Muslims in Ramadan.

After Ramadan, there will be the Aidilfitri celebrations. It is often forgotten that celebratory periods are periods of sadness for individuals, families, and communities.

While everyone is commercially expected to celebrate, there are those in dire poverty, there are orphans, those who are in terminally ill beds, those who just lost their beloved, those who have Alzheimer's, and all other kinds of known and unknown diseases.

Celebrative periods are for remembrance and prayers for the beloved and departed. Celebrative times are times for reflections, for recognition of remorse, for atonement, repentance, for making amends, forgiveness and for a second chance of doing good.

Festivities, fasting and reflections nurture adversity intelligence. Adversity intelligence is acquired by discipline, resilience, restraint in wants, speech, thoughts and unbridled ambition.

Being stoic and ascetic, virtues known to the ancient Greeks and other disciplined societies, are aspects of adversity intelligence.

Adversity intelligence allows for self-esteem maintenance and self-enhancement strategies, emotional well-being and for becoming better persons. The person on the spiritual journey should be immune to adversity and misfortune, and free of emotions of envy, fear or unrestrained sexual passions.

Adversity intelligence is not taught in schools and universities, which may not be appropriate sites for teaching, learning adversity intelligence anyway.

Adversity intelligence may be best learned in outbound school programmes, military programmes, or outdoor programmes organised by religious institutions, for the actual practice of adversity.

Between the seasons of sorrows and the seasons of joys, individuals have to be mindful that they own their own feelings and are not the subjects of manipulation of the market economy.

To be able to live life to the fullest and enjoy life meaningfully, one has to build adversity intelligence. Adversity intelligence is closely linked to emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence.

Like joy and pain, Yin-Yang, the Here and the Hereafter are paradoxes for the living. Leo Tolstoy in War and Peace realised the paradox of life and the adversity intelligence required in order to make sense of life.

Therefore, he observed: "The most difficult thing but an essential one is to love Life, to love it even when one suffers, because Life is all, Life is God, and to love Life means to love God."

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