

Yow, C. L. (2015, January 1). The non-Muslim fasting sensation: Real or fabricated? *The Malay Mail Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/what-you-think/article/the-non-muslims-fasting-sensations-real-or-fabricated-yow-chong-lee>

The non-Muslim fasting sensation: Real or fabricated?

By Yow Chong Lee

JULY 6 — In less than two weeks time, our Muslim friends will celebrate Syawal. Before Syawal, there is Ramadhan in which they will undergo a month of fasting without food and beverage from dawn to dusk, a period of nine to twenty hours a day, depending on where they are.

Generally, Muslims living near to the North pole (e.g. Denmark, Iceland and Sweden) will fast longer than their counterparts in the Southern hemisphere (e.g. Argentina and Chile).

Meanwhile, Malaysian Muslims are fasting in average of 13 hours a day. A period which is not too short or too long, in comparison to other countries. However, it can be long enough, for some to make non-sensical arguments.

At the beginning of the fasting month, Malaysians are bizarrely stung with the suggestion that non-muslims have to hide themselves if they were to eat during fasting period.

Some even went to a greater length by forbidding the non-Muslim students from eating as they are deemed as the threat for Muslim students whose faith is “unquestionably weak”.

On the other hand, there were also discussions on the topic when a story of one Chinese student who learns to fast with her Muslim friends went viral on internet.

This has reinforced the idea of social proof (or some would call it “herd instinct”), when people are getting reactionary towards things happening around them.

In other words, people tend to “like” what others “like” and vice versa. This is particularly true with the existence of social media where the buttons of “like” and “share” are just a click away.

I, for some occasions, have also experienced fasting with my Muslim friends since schooling days. I commonly start with fasting of food while having drinks to keep myself hydrated and accustomed to the practice for a period of two to three days before I were to fast entirely in the following days.

I do remember my experience having iftar at our university’s mosque compound where variety of good food is served to students and staffs for free. My friends and I were happily fasting and breaking fast without much “trouble” or you may say sensations which are increasingly intensified nowadays.

This unnecessary sensations are part and parcel the legacy of our social and cultural segregation that keeps us apart from trying to understand or even tolerating each other.

Therefore, you will see chauvinists who tried to champion the collective rights of their Muslim members from not seeing others eating during fasting month.

This, has definitely turned away many non-Muslims who attempt to fast or trying to understand their Muslim friends through fasting.

The fasting experience is nonetheless invaluable for that it allows ones to empathise those without food, and in Malaysian context, standing at the shoes of our Muslim friends who fast.

For me, fasting provides me a greater understanding of my Muslim friends. And if ones were to delve deeper, it allows them to see fasting as a way to come to term with desires. Be it desire for food, beverage, cigarettes, or sensory ways such as sex and profound words.

In nowadays’ context, it also applies to our desire to browse internet, peeping on others’ social media posts, or even having the “herd instincts”.

There are those who fast “on the surface”. In other words, they fast because they are asked to fast by their family, friends and the society as a whole.

From psychoanalysts’ point of view, this way of fasting is a form of repression. As one has to repress his/ her desire during fasting month, which can later turn into unknown forms of manifestations such as dream and artistic expression on one hand, and violence and irrationality, on the other.

It can be true, however, I would rather look at it from multi-point-of-views.

Instead of seeing it purely as repression, I would rather see the practice of fasting as a way to come to terms with ourselves and our desire.

If one managed to come to terms with his/her desire and goes beyond purely repression, s/he has achieved something bigger than life.

A pure form of happiness.

Are you fasting now?

And, a pressing question to ask: “Am I on surface fasting?”

Or probably an additional question to ponder on, “Am I in my clear and rational mind during fasting month?”

Happy fasting!