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THE SUMMER SACRIFICE

Last month, alongside millions of Muslims worldwide, I observed the sacred month of Ramadan, abstaining from food and drink from dawn till dusk. And yes, that included no water too! But Ramadan is not just about abstaining from physical nourishment; this period of self-control and discipline, is also aimed at refining one's character and deepening one's spiritual relationship with God. The experience, though challenging, offered profound insights into the dynamics of sacrifice and struggle, and their correlation with eventual success. For instance, I found despite the difficulties of the day, every evening as I broke my fast, the feelings of hunger, thirst and fatigue would disappear after a drink of water and a small bite to eat. Every evening without fail I would think to myself 'what was all the fuss about?' Reflecting on this period has led me to draw similarities between the ethos of Ramadan and the struggles we face as dental students, particularly during the demanding summer term and exam period.

The summer term is undeniably exhausting. I'll be the first to admit it. The essence of sacrifice is palpable throughout this time with many of us entrenched in the hustle of academia. This elongated term poses unique challenges, as it extends well into mid-July while other courses free their students much earlier. As a result, campuses seemingly transform into ghost towns, leaving us to grapple with looming exams in empty libraries only amplifying the sense of isolation; a scene made even more difficult with the sun beaming outside. And don't get me started on the annual accommodation move that's always conveniently placed on a random weekday. Sound familiar?

I'm aware that I'm ranting and being *slightly* pessimistic, but a healthy dose of complaining can serve as a cathartic release. It allows us the opportunity to vocalise our shared stresses and momentarily unburden ourselves. But a good rant needs to be tempered with constructive action and a proactive mindset, because amidst this dose of summertime struggle, there does lie an opportunity for growth and resilience. So, how does one find this and turn up the brightness during this stressful summer term?



It goes without saying that every individual's journey is unique, with distinct challenges and goals shaping their approaches. However, amidst these differences, I've discovered that certain principles hold universal value. Among them, I find the framework of the 'three Rs' indispensable in our ability to tackle the summertime blues.

Firstly, it's crucial to *remind* yourself of your original motivation that has put you on this course. Why is it that you are studying dentistry? What is your guiding compass? What keeps you pushing through those difficult moments? Use these answers to anchor yourself and provide the necessary clarity that is needed in those cloudy periods.

Secondly, consistent *reward* is essential for maintaining momentum and wellbeing. Allocating ample time to relax and decompress allows for you to get the best out of yourself. It seems counterproductive but taking that step back to recharge will eventually spur you forward in the face of challenges.

Finally, the third R emphasises the importance of *recognising* this term as the conclusion of the academic year. As the end draws near, it symbolises a critical juncture in our journey, where the culmination of months of hard work becomes increasingly tangible. It's akin to seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, and it can ignite a sense of empowerment to finish strong. Just as a racehorse senses the proximity of the finish line and draws strength from the anticipation, we too can tap into this reservoir of resolve. I share this analogy not to persuade you to get tickets to the next races at Cheltenham, but to remind us that recognition of how close we are to the end enables us to navigate the final stretch with determination and focus.

This summer term will undoubtedly encompass the spirit of sacrifice and struggle, but it should be embraced. The true sweetness of success is hidden in these moments of hardship. And who knows, maybe when we get our results and hopefully get the positive news that we've passed our exams, we might look back and say – what was all the fuss about?

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