Fasting as a Factor in Soul Growth

Not infrequently questions concerning the benefit or detriment of fasting comes before the writer [Max Heindel]*, and it may therefore be well to elucidate the origin and rationale of this practice that we may determine what effect, if any, it has upon soul growth.

Under the ancient dispensations it was required that sacrifices of bulls and goats should be made as atonement for sin, for man then treasured his material possessions even higher than today, and felt keenly their loss when forced to give them up for such a purpose. Even in modern days indulgences are bought and forgiveness of sins promised anyone donating a sum of money to the Catholic Church for purchasing candles and similar paraphernalia required in the service. But there has always been an esoteric teaching, which is being promulgated exoterically today, and this teaching does not accept the sacrifice of an animal, money, or other possessions, but demands that each one makes a sacrifice of himself.

This was taught to the aspirants in the ancient Mystery School when they were prepared for the mystic rite of initiation. To them were explained the mysteries of the vital body, how it is composed of four ethers: The Chemical Ether, which is necessary to assimilation; the Life Ether, which furthers growth and propagation; the Light Ether, which is the vehicle of sense perception; the Reflecting Ether, which is the storehouse of memory. He was thoroughly instructed in the functions of the two lower ethers as compared with the two higher. He knew that all the purely animal functions of the body depended upon the density of the lower ethers, and the two upper ethers composed the soul body, which is the vehicle of service, and he aspired, naturally, to cultivate this glorious garment by self-abnegation and by curbing the propensities of the lower natures, just as we do today. These facts were kept secret from the masses, as said, or rather they should have been. But some neophytes who were over-zealous to attain, no matter how, forgot that it is only by service and unselfishness that the golden wedding garment composed of the two higher ethers is grown. They thought that the occult maxim,

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\text{Gold in the crucible,} \\
\text{Wrought in the fire;} \\
\text{Light as the winds,} \\
\text{Higher and higher.}
\]

meant only that so long as the lower nature, the dross, was expelled, it did not matter how. And if they could find an easy method, they would have left only the gold composed of two higher ethers, the soul-body, in which they could then enter the visible world without let or hindrance. They reasoned that as the chemical ether is the agent of assimilation, it could be eliminated from the vital

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body by starving the physical vehicle. They also thought that as the life ether is the avenue of propagation, they could starve it out by living celibate lives. By following that method, so they reasoned, they would retain only the two higher ethers, and therefore they practiced all the austerities they could think of, fasting among others. By this process the dense body lost its health and became emaciated. The passional nature, which sought gratification by the exercise of propagative function, was stilled by castigations. It is true that in this horrible manner the lower nature seemed to be subject, and it is also true that when the bodily functions were thus brought to a very low ebb—visions, or rather hallucinations, were often the reward of these misguided people. Others who heard of their supposed sanctity were eager to imitate them. Thus their example has diverted thousands of seeking souls from the true Way.

But the result obtained by these misguided people and their followers is far from being what was intended by the training in the Mystery school. The candidate was there taught, first and foremost, that the body is the temple of God, and that to defile, destroy, or mutilate it in any manner is a great sin. Indulgence of the appetite is a sin, a defiling practice which brings with it certain retribution, but it is no more to be reprehended than the practice of fasting for soul growth. Right living is neither feasting nor fasting, but giving the body those elements which are necessary to maintain it in the proper form of health, strength, and efficiency as an instrument of the spirit. Therefore, fasting for soul growth is a pseudo-method which has exactly the opposite effect of that which it was designed to accomplish by its short-sighted originators. “I am the door,” said the Christ, “if any man enter not by the door, the same is a thief and a robber.”

Similarly with the practice of celibacy for the sake of soul growth, the maxim enunciated at the beginning of this paragraph applies equally well. It is reprehensible when men and women made in the image of God degrade themselves by indulgence of the passions to a status lower than that of beasts, but it is equally reprehensible when those who live otherwise good and holy lives refuse to sacrifice their aspirations to give a waiting soul the body and environment it needs, that they may have all their time for self-development.

They may by fasting attenuate the chemical ether, and by their fanatical selfish celibate lives they may also eliminate the life ether to a great extent, but these measures will never build the golden wedding garment which is the ‘open sesame’ to the mystic marriage feast, for want of which some who have succeeded in surreptitiously entering—by just such illegitimate methods as fasting, castigation and celibacy—will be thrown out into outer darkness.

While, as we have shown, fasting for soul growth is utterly wrong and reprehensible, it may sometimes be necessary to fast for the sake of health, but it should be understood, that under normal conditions, there ought to be no necessity for such measures. If we live right, eat the proper food, get the necessary amount of sleep and adequate exercise, we do not need to fast any more than we need to take medicine. Dr. Leech shows some of the benefits of fasting for health in the following article.

**RANDOM SHOTS ON FASTING.**

The observation and study of forty-odd thousand patients during a quarter of a century of continuous practice has impressed me profoundly of the importance of some of the neglected small things. When to eat and when not to eat seems an insignificant thing, but it concerns our very physical existence and often has much to do with our moral welfare. Yet in all the medical literature I am unable to find a practical book on the subject of fasting. There is a shameful dearth of medical writings along this line.

No acute infectious disease can be cured without fasting or having assimilation cut short at some point. The most important desideratum in the treatment of enteric typhoid fever is a two or three week’s fasting. If the attendant fails to do this, nature interferes by producing anorexia, laxity, and delirium. Abstinence is the first thing thought of in an attack, or threatened attack, of appendicitis. In this condition, and a host of kindred troubles, if we give food we but add insult to injury.

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The physician who has a robust patient suffering from acute arthritis will bring about a cure by an absolute fast lasting from four to fourteen days, providing he does not fail to supply him with suffi-
cient water and sees that the heart has proper sup-
port. Local anodynes may be necessary to alleviate
the pain, but the degree of suffering is rarely great
enough to demand morphine. Morphine will pro-
long the period necessary for fasting and will
increase the nerve symptoms by locking up the
secretions, preventing elimination, and causing the
re-absorption of toxins.

Some may claim that
they cure acute rheuma-
tism by medication alone
and not taking any heed to
the amount and quality of
food ingested. If so, the
creosote, guaiacol, salicy-
lates, or whatnots they
may have given, arrested
digestion and assimilation,
forcing the physical organ-
ism to fast by being unnec-
essarily burdened. Iodine,
phenol, and other antisept-
cics in enterics cut short in
a nauseating manner the
desire for food, compelling
mechanically the system to
fast. Fasting is not the doc-
trine of nihilism, but it is
the old problem of when to
or when not to meditate. It
is no less a crime to give a
sick infant food when not
needed as it is to give morphine
when it is not demanded. Either so
given will either kill the child or prolong the dis-
ease.

An all-cereal and vegetable diet would practical-
ly eliminate appendicitis from the category of med-
icine, relegating it to the shelf of medical curiosi-
ties. A wineless and a meatless diet would reduce
the divorce evil fully 90 per cent. It is but the nat-
ural law of vibration and it will gradually whip us
collectively into obedience. An all-vegetable diet is
not demanded.

The well-fed dog which barks daily after an auto-
mobile goes on absolute fasts three to five times a
year, and after each period comes forth with renewed
energy. As a prophylactic of disease and the prolong-
gation of life and that we may be better able to sub-
due our passions, it is my opinion that all strong indi-
viduals should fast from food absolutely from one to
two days several times annually. It adds to the con-
structive work, giving the system ample time to elim-
inate poisons and rest from the overburdens. Diuretics and purgatives may rapidly eliminate, but
there are times when they
are burdens to already
overworked organs and
vessels. Quick elimination,
however valuable in some
instances, is not necessary
in healthy individuals. It is
well here to caution those
who fast to keep their
friends ignorant of the fact
during the period, and also
to beware of self-pity;
throwing off constantly
that feeling of sorrow for
one’s self and keeping the
body and mind lightly
engaged. An idle brain and
prolonged fasting will ren-
der one liable to subjective
phenomenon where the
person might become
obsessed by an entity or
“elemental” of another
plane of existence. In eat-
ing or fasting we must ever bear in
mind that our Ego (real Self) is not
our physical body, and the more ponderous our dense
body becomes, the less control has the Ego over
vibrating atoms therein.

Judicious fasting is but living the “life,” and it
alone will banish from our system arteriosclerosis,
enlarged prostate, hepatic, and renal calculi. Reckless yielding to our appetites and desires is
more disastrous to our existence than war, and I will
venture to state that amativeness [the author’s
euphemism for sexual promiscuity—Ed.] is the
primary etiological factor in the production of can-
cer and mental poverty.

—W. Stuart Leech, M. D.