

Why Fasting In U.S.A.
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Many healers claim that fasting is a particularly useful therapy for Americans and for the modern lifestyle, subjected to advertisements, consumption of heavy diets, overeating, junk food and constant exposure to food additives and chemicals by chaotic chemistry between media and corporations. Some alternative practitioners have gone so far as to estimate that the average American is carrying 5-10 pounds of toxic substances in their bodies, for which fasting is the quickest and most effective means of removal. In this article I will delve into the meaning of fasting according to Islam and Christianity, its importance to man etc all in an effort to make you understand that we owe it a duty to humanity to help and assist one another, to feel each others pain and share each others joy.

Used for thousands of years, fasting is one of the oldest therapies in medicine. Many of the great doctors of ancient times and many of the oldest healing systems have recommended it as an integral method of healing and prevention. Hippocrates, the father of Western medicine, believed fasting enabled the body to heal itself. Paracelsus, another great healer in the Western tradition, wrote 500 years ago that "fasting is the greatest remedy, the physician within." Ayurvedic medicine, the world's oldest healing system, has long advocated fasting as a major treatment.

Fasting has also been used in nearly every religion in the world, including Islam Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism. Many of history's great spiritual leaders fasted for mental and spiritual clarity, including Mohammad, Jesus, and Buddha. In one of the famous political acts of the last century, the Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi fasted for 21 days to promote peace.

FASTING IN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY:

Fasting from the Islamic perspective is abstaining completely from eating, drinking, intimate sexual contacts and smoking from the break of dawn till sunset. It is a matchless Islamic institution which teaches man the principle of sincere love to God and Brotherhood to man. Fasting teaches man a creative sense of hope, devotion, patience, unselfishness, moderation, willpower, wise saving, sound budgeting, mature adaptability, healthy survival, discipline, spirit of social belonging, unity and brotherhood.

Fasting is defined above from Islamic perspective, yet it is also a time honored Christian ritual. It is the voluntary sacrifice of food and sometimes drinks, too as recorded in some Christian scriptures. Abstaining from food is the typical kind of fast. (Daniel 6:18) There are occasions when people abstain from both food and drink, though this is not common. (Ezra 10:6) Fasting in Christianity differs typically; fasts are one day in length. (Judges 20:26) Sometimes, they are three days (Esther 4:16), or even seven days; "And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days. (1 Samuel 31:13) .On three occasions in the Bible, people fasted for forty days. This is not a

prescribed practice; these were very unusual circumstances. The first occasion was when Moses received the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 34:28) The next occasion was when Elijah encountered God before the anointing of Elisha. (1 Kings 19:8) The third occasion for such a fast was when Jesus was in the wilderness and tempted by Satan. (Matthew 4:2).

REASONS FOR FASTING:

In Islam there is Obligatory fasting and recommended fasting. Recommended fasting is done once a year for the period of (thirty days) the month of Ramadan; the ninth month of the Islamic year. While recommended fasting includes fasting every Monday and Thursday of every week, three days in the middle of each Islamic month, six days after Ramadan following the Feast Day and a few days of the two months before Ramadan. Fasting of Ramadan is a worship act which is obligatory on every adult Muslim, male or female if he/she is mentally and physically fit and not on a journey. Although with some exceptions: women during their period of menstruation and while nursing their child, and also in case of travel/journey and sickness for both men and women.

Fasting in the month of Ramadan is compulsory on every Muslim adult. The Arabic word sawm is used for fasting. The word sawm (plural siyam) literally means 'to refrain', but as an Islamic term, it means refraining from food, drinks and sexual activity from dawn to sunset. Allah says in the Quran, in Surah Al-Baqarah (2-183): 'O you who believe, Fasting is prescribed on you as it was prescribed to those before you so that you may become self-restrained.'

The importance of fasting in Ramadan is clearly expressed in several sayings of the Prophet (S.A.W.). It is reported by Abu Hurairah that the Prophet said: 'He who fasts during Ramadan with faith and seeks his reward from Allah will have his past sins forgiven; he who prays during the night in Ramadan with faith and seeks his reward from Allah will have his past sins forgiven; and he who passes Lailat al- Qadr in prayer with faith and seeks his reward from Allah will have his past sins forgiven.'
(Bukhari and Muslim).

Fasting in Ramadan is practiced by Muslims all over the world. The most significant aspect of fasting is the development of God's consciousness (Taqwa) in the heart and the soul of a fasting Muslim. One must abstain from immoral behavior and attitude as well. Refraining from food and drink is essential during fast but it is not sufficient. The Prophet of Allah is reported to have said: 'If one does not abandon falsehood in words and deeds, Allah has no need for his abandoning of his food and drink.'(Al-Bukhari)

In Christianity there are many reasons given in the Bible as well for fasting. The fasting itself is an act of sacrifice and when we fast and experience hunger, we are reminded of God and His sacrifice for us. While fasting denies the flesh comfort, it feeds the spirit with strength. Fasts are voluntary part of religious tradition done in obedience to God. When you decide to fast, be clear with yourself and with God about why you are fasting, how long you will fast and use the time normally spent preparing and eating food to

deepen your relationship with God. The fast should serve a purpose; there should be a significant reason for it.

MEDICAL IMPORTANCE OF FASTING:

Having talked about the religious importance and reasons why one should fast. Medically too, fasting had been proved to be a good therapy for many ailments

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Fasting has been used in Europe as a medical treatment for years. Many spas and treatment centers, particularly those in Germany, Sweden, and Russia, use medically supervised fasting. Fasting has gained popularity in American alternative medicine over the past several decades, and many doctors feel it is beneficial. Fasting is a central therapy in detoxification, a healing method founded on the principle that the build up of toxic substances in the body is responsible for many illnesses and conditions.

The principle of fasting is simple. When the intake of food is temporarily stopped, many systems of the body are given a break from the hard work of digestion. The extra energy gives the body the chance to heal and restore itself, and burning stored calories gets rid of toxic substances stored in the body.

Fasting has been found to be an effective treatment for psychological and emotional disorders. It helps a person to firm up his will, cultivate and refine his taste and manners, strengthen his conviction of doing good, avoid controversy, petulance and rashness, which all contribute towards a sane and healthy personality. Besides nurturing resistance and ability to face hardships and endurance, fasting reflects on outward physical appearance by cutting out gluttony and getting rid of excess fat. The benefits of fasting on health do not stop there but are instrumental in alleviating a number of physical diseases, including those of the digestive systems, such as chronic stomachache, inflammation of the colon, liver diseases, indigestion, and conditions such as obesity, arteriosclerosis, high blood pressure, asthma, diphtheria and many other maladies.

A Swiss physician Dr. Barsilus noted that: "The advantages of hunger as a remedy exceed those of ingesting medicine several times". As readers are well aware, several physicians advise patients to skip meals, sometimes for a few days, before prescribing them a controlled diet.

Generally speaking, fasting hastens the destruction of the decaying tissues of the body by means of hunger, and then builds new tissues through nutrition. This is why some

scientists suggest that fasting should be regarded as an effective means of restoring youthfulness and longevity. However, while the above is true of fasting, Islam exempts from fasting sick and old people whose health is bound to deteriorate. Talking about Health leads us to regulations. Fasting should have its regulations too, and not simply the in orderly skipping meals, that is bound to harm health and stamina, rather than improving them. Here again Islam provides the answer, and in order to realize the benefits of fasting, it recommends the late midnight meals called 'Sahar' (before the formal start of a fast) and the breaking of the fast at the time prescribed. Of course, to ensure good health one should abstain from gluttony after breaking fast. Under no conditions should pregnant or breast-feeding women, or anyone who is diabetic or has kidney or liver problems, fast. Neither should anyone fast who suffers from an eating disorder, asthma or tuberculosis.

In conclusion, I want to remind America of its greatness, this nation America is great and will be even greater if we could take a little time to remember, what we could do to help the Hungry, the Homeless, the sick and the poor. What I am suggesting here is, since when did we really feel the pain of our brothers and sisters who have no means of eating a minimum three times a day, we need to understand what those Hungry and starving people feel out there for us to really understand the pain they go through. What I am suggesting here is for America and Americans to look at the virtues of Fasting, to look away from the T.V adverts just for a second, to skip meaningless consumption, in order to come to terms with sincere love to God and Brotherhood to mankind. Fasting is the solution. Fast, so that you can understand what other less advantaged Americans feel in order to make some change. Fast today so that you can help to destroy the chaotic chemistry created by corporations.