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Fasting

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Introduction

In Nepal, five hours from Katmandu, in the middle of the forest, people come to meditate and pray in front of young Yogi. 24 hours a day, this young man sits in the hollow of a tree, in full meditation. He does not move, he does not eat, he does not drink. He remains sited quiet, breathes very little, very gently and does not need anything. For the believers, he is the reincarnation of Buddha! Miracle or not?

Once, Buddha was touring with a large group of monks he addressed them saying "I, monks, do not eat a meal in the evening. Not eating a meal in the evening, I, monks, am aware of good health and of being without illness and of buoyancy, and strength and living in comfort. Come, do you, too, monks, not eat a meal in the evening. Not eating a meal in the evening, you too, monks, will be aware of good health and living in comfort."



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, has long advocated fasting as a major treatment. In ancient Greece, Pythagoras was among many who

extolled its virtues. The Renaissance doctor Paracelsus called it the "physician within". Indeed, fasting in one form or another is a distinguished tradition and throughout the centuries, devotees have claimed it brings physical and spiritual renewal.

In primitive cultures, a fast was often demanded before going to war, or as part of a coming-of-age ritual. It was used to assuage an angry deity and by native North Americans, as a rite to avoid catastrophes such as famine. Fasting has played a key role in all world's major religions (apart from Zoroastrianism which prohibits it), being associated with penitence and other forms of self-control. Judaism has several annual fast days including Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonements; in Islam, Muslims fast during the holy month of Ramadan, while Roman Catholics and Eastern orthodoxy observe a 40 day fast during Lent, the period when Christ fasted 40 days in the desert.

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 buildup of toxic substances in the body is responsible for many illnesses and conditions.

Dr. Shelton's Health school claimed to have helped 40,000 patients recover their health with a water fast, Shelton wrote "Fasting must be recognized as a fundamental and radical process that is older than any other mode of caring for the sick organism, for it is employed on the plane of instinct". Shelton was an advocate, of alternative medicine, an author, pacifist, vegetarian, supporter of rawism and fasting.

In the UK, fasting became part of the "Nature Cure", an approach which also stressed the importance of exercise, diet, sunshine, fresh air and "positive thinking".

“The human body has an incredible capacity for healing and longevity. Within it is an intelligence more powerful than any drugs or a surgeon’s knife. Fasting gives your body the well-deserved vacation it needs to repair itself. The power that made the body can heal the body. Even one fast day per week provides 50 rejuvenating days per year. Give your cells and yourselves the opportunity to cleanse, nourish, rejuvenate and heal” [1].

Alternative therapists are getting mainstream consciousness to take responsibility for their own health through improving diet, exercise, nutrition and educating people to understand the role that unresolved negative emotions have in the creation of disease.

Vacation time is a good time to fast. Fifteen days of fasting under stress would achieve the same amount of detoxification as a peaceful ten days fast. You are saving energy by not digesting food, but if you are spending it through emotional or mental stress, then it is not available for healing. The human body will focus its attention wherever there are immediate needs. If there is an emotional crisis, the muscles will tighten, the adrenals will rev up, the heart will pump faster and the blood pressure will increase. No time for healing, if you are lying on the beach, your body-machine will work on internal repair. Dead cells and toxins will be eliminated. Liver cells will be rejuvenated. Small intestine and colon will purge themselves of unwanted matter, etc.

The most successful fasts begin with a great desire that comes from deep within and is based in a physical or spiritual need. Motivation for fasting should be physical healing. Instead of loading up the body with medicines, which interfere with the body’s natural healing process, fasting cleanse the bloodstream, tissues and cells for deep fundamental healing. Fasting rejuvenates.

“Traditionally, fasting has been used to improve a wide variety of ailment including some of the following:

Asthma	High/Low Blood Pressure
Arteriosclerosis	Psoriasis
Acne	Ulcers
Bronchitis	Boils
Hay Fever	Liver Problems
Hives	Constipation
Rheumatism	Gall Stones
Obesity	Diarrhea
Insomnia	Tumors
Migraine Headaches	Inflammations

Fasting increases energy and extends life. In a study on mice who were fasted every third day, their life span was increased by 40 percent” [2].

The mind clears, the whole-body quiets and you are at one attuned to a different state of consciousness. It improves mental attitude and strengthens your discipline. Resolve as you meet its personal challenges.

“Water is critical while cleansing because, without enough water, elimination is sluggish and cleansing reactions are

significantly increased. On a hot summer day, the average size person should drink about a gallon of water while cleansing or one ounce of water for each pound of body weight. On cooler days, at least three quarters of water are needed.

Normally after we drink water and it enters the blood stream it is immediately integrated with blood electrolytes. Sodium deficient blood will also be oxygen-deficient and when it enters the brain the body reacts by withdrawing water out of the blood in order to concentrate the sodium and re-achieve homeostasis. This process causes fluids to accumulate in the brain, skin, and lungs” [3].

“Man Does not Die, He Kills Himself.” –Seneca

People get sick because of negative thoughts and feelings, poor food and too many acid-forming foods, and chemicals. All of these create acids, toxins, and congestion in the body and in this way the body is itself-poisoned.

The most dangerous enemies of the friendly bacteria are: drugs, alcohol, cooked meat, bread, white sugar, fried foods, soft-drinks, acid-forming foods.

“A complete fasting of 24 hours gives the bowels a chance to have a rest; the mind is free to think of God for many more hours than you may otherwise do. The fast rejuvenates the body and makes the mind concentrated. All your energies are thoroughly recouped.

Physically, your system gets an entire overhaul. Mentally, you develop more concentration and resisting capacity. You improve in firmness, there is a great capacity to withstand physical disturbances, illness, fatigue and disease” [4].

Fasting is nature’s curative agent. It can restore health where everything else failed. It gives nature a chance to clean the system. There is a difference between fasting and starving. It is giving up food when there is no real hunger, to eliminate poisons and accumulated toxins from the system, and allow nature to do its work of healing. Never eat unless you are really hungry. Complete or partial loss of appetite gives you the warning to stop eating and to fast. If you stuff your stomach with food when there is no hunger, you are against nature, and nature will punish you with sickness, latter on.

“We recommend a gradual elimination of red meat, then white meat, then to go to raw foods, then soups and liquids and then begin 21 days with a clean and tuned system. How long it may take to go from being a meat eater to raw foods then liquids will be up to each individual. Do it in a way that gives joy and comfort. The body will guide you if you listen” [5].

We are familiar with our physical bodies and their functions, but often less so with our bodies subtle energy systems: chakras, subtle bodies and the aura. Each of us are made up of layers of vibrating energy and each of which has their own specific vibration and purpose.

“I would also like to mention that blockages in these energy fields occur through lack of mastery of the mental and emotional

bodies. Techniques to clean energies and realign the chakras are like taking a pain killer for a headache. They are effective but they do not always address the problem, only symptoms. These techniques need to be used in conjunction with mind mastery to produce long term optimum health" [6].

The exercises via invocation and meditation should be done daily until chakras (energy's centers) are spinning, rich in color and activated to their full potential. Chakras respond to toxicity of thoughts and emotions and change in color to reflect imbalance. Hatha Yoga is the practical way to control the mind through control of the prana.

"According to Patanjali, author of the (Raja) Yoga Sutras, there are five kinds of vrittis, some being positive and some not. Of these five, only one is entirely positive, and that is when the seer identifies with the Self (Atman). This is only possible when the thought waves are slowed down. Then the seer sees, in the calm lake of the mind, his own Self (Atman). But as long as the wind exists, we will see the tree moving, the leaves fluttering – sometimes quietly sometimes violently, but always moving.

Hatha Yoga Asks: "How Do You Stop These Waves?" and "How Does the Seer See the Self?"

As the waves on the lake are created by the wind on the lake, so also the waves on the mind are created by the prana and apana.

Sometimes this energy moves very fast, sometimes slow. And according to the nature of the prana/apana motion, the thought waves will be very intensive or very slow" [7].

Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

Acknowledgement

None.

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