



FASTING AND SALVATION

Introduction

We have two concepts of Fasting:

- Fasting, in its special meaning, is abstaining from food for a period of time, followed by eating food free from animal fat.
- Fasting, in its general meaning, involves all kinds of piety (holiness and overcoming the lust of the flesh).

Introduction

St. John Tebaysy said:

“Fasting for the body is to be hungry for food, but fasting for the soul is to be hungry and thirsty for righteousness, to fast from evil and to remember sin.”

Introduction:

St. Paul said:

“And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things... I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” (1Cor 9:25-27)

Therefore, it is better that before we go into details to discuss the subject of fasting in its special meaning, we discuss it in its general meaning.

Subjecting the Body:

- St. Paul the great missionary and the evangelist of the whole world, who ascended to the third heaven, who saw unspeakable matters, and who labored more than any of the apostles, says: “I discipline... disqualified” (1Cor 9:25-27).
- Is it possible that such a great Saint be disqualified? And fall in the lust of the flesh and loose the reward in heaven?

Subjecting the Body:

- This proves to us an important aspect of the true Christian spiritual struggle.
- How can those who say, "we are saved," be sure that they have reached the kingdom
- As if they have taken away the sinful body and do not need to struggle against the body and its lust
- As if they do not sin although they are still in the flesh.
- St. Peter says, "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1Peter 4:18)

Subjecting the Body:

- No doubt the body and its lust are a strong obstacle in the spiritual life.
- The spirit desires to be with God, but the body pulls it down and hinders its growth. (Gal 5:17).
- So subjecting the body should have priority in our spiritual struggle for a perfect Christian life.
- For molding iron, it is not enough to melt it with fire, you have to hammer it to shape it the way you want.

Subjecting the Body:

- Similarly, it is not enough to melt our hearts with the flame of prayers, for example, we have to hammer them with the hammer of fasting and piety.
- St. Paul says: "If you live after the flesh, you shall die, but if you through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live." (Rom 8:13)
- "For thy sake, we are killed all the day..." (Ps 44:22)

Subjecting the Body:

- Piety is the cross that everyone has to carry if we want to follow Jesus.
- "He that rules his spirit is better than he that takes a city." (Prov 16:32)
- It is a great struggle to subdue the body. What Joseph did when he controlled himself and didn't yield to the temptations of the master's wife is much greater than all that he did when he became the second man in Egypt.

Subjecting the Body:

- Also St. John Chrysostom says: “for David not to fight back his enemy, Saul, this was a greater accomplishment than his killing Goliath the giant.”
- One of the important means of subjecting the body and its lust is **Fasting**.

What is Fasting?

- It is deprivation from some food, gradually becoming voluntary pious in food.
- Therefore it is not weakening of the body, but subjecting it to strengthen the spirit.
- It is not a duty we are obliged to do, but rather we need it to overcome our bodies, and so that the Lord may come into our lives and we may be affected by His salvation.

The Importance of Fasting in the Spiritual Life:

- Our Lord Jesus honored fasting by practicing it and also His sayings in the New and Old Testaments.
- The struggle of fasting should precede all other struggles in the spiritual life, to facilitate our way to God.
- The first commandment was not to eat food. From this point, the first human beings had fallen. Therefore, all those who want to struggle in God's fear have to start the building from the first step.
- When our good Savior started His ministry, He started also from this point.

The Significance of Fasting

- Since fasting in Paradise was important, how much more would it be outside?
- Adam's punishment was death when he disobeyed God and neglected fasting.
- Moses, Elijah, Esther (removed the punishment of death inflicted on the people).
- Daniel, Nehemiah (1:4), Anna (Lk2:37), David (Ps 35:13, Ps 109:24) Nineveh, and many others in the Old Testament.

The Significance of Fasting

- Our Lord Jesus fasted and said: “When the bridegroom shall be taken from them, then they shall fast.” (Matt 9:14, 15).
- He also said: “This kind does not come forth except by prayers and fasting.” (Mk 9:29).
- The Church of Antioch (Acts 13:3) & (Acts 27:9),
- St. Paul (Acts 27:21) & (2Cor. 6:4,5) & (2Cor. 11:27) & (1Cor. 7:5).
- The life of Saints is full of fasting and prayer and also in their sayings.

The Effect of Fasting

- Saved the people of Nineveh (Jonah 3:10)
- Saved Daniel & the three youth.
- St. Augustine said: "Do you want your prayers to rise up to heaven? Let your prayers have two wings which are fasting and alms."

Why do I Fast:

1. Food and Energy

- Lots of food stirs up lust. Abundance of energy and strength more than needed naturally can lead to anger, killing, adultery,...much more than the week.
- Energy is dependent on the quality and quantity of food.
- Therefore, fasting is a spiritual exercise to bring the body into subjection and not extra nutrition that may be used in the wrong way.

Why do I Fast:

- St. Casian said: "When the stomach is full of all kinds of food, this gives rise to greediness and you can't direct your thoughts rightly."
- Sodom's iniquity was the fullness of bread (Ezek 16:49).

Why do I Fast

2. **Fasting is a strong bridle** (curb) for the body. St. Irenaeus said: "Our Lord God doesn't benefit from our empty stomachs, but this is a mean to preserve chastity."

3. **Fasting is the first step on the spiritual road.**

- **Body and Spirit.** If one dominates the other the person becomes spiritual or physical. If we want to be spiritual, we have to overcome the body and bring it into subjection to facilitate the way for the spirit to grow.

- Our Lord after baptism, started His new life with fasting.

Why do I Fast

4. Fasting paves the way to virtues and gifts:

- Being the starting point of the spiritual road, it leads to virtues.
- The wind can lift up the bird's feather, as long as nothing is sticking to it. But if it is wet or has dirt, the wind can't lift it. (Purity)
- The green plant does not catch fire immediately. (Resiliency)

Why do I Fast

5. Fasting rectifies the body and trains the senses:

- St. Paul says, "I keep under (discipline) my body.." (1Cor 9:27). Keep under is used in revolutions. The body truly revolts. Nations capture those who are revolting and put them in prison in order to keep under any revolution and avoid revolutions.
- Fasting captures our bodies and senses by not giving them the things they desire.
- Fasting besides its training to the body and senses, leads to the purity of the soul.

Why do I Fast

6. Fasting Gives us Will Power:

- Adam sinned because his will had weakened when confronted with the outside temptations.
- Any person sins either because he is deceived by the temptations, or because his/her will weakens toward lust and can't fight the temptations → importance of will power.
- Fasting, especially when skipping breakfast, is one of the best means for strengthening the will power. When we fast, we overcome the desires of food → gradually overcoming the lust of the body.

How do we Fast

1. **Controlling the lust** of the soul. Fasting is not just a change of food, but a change of heart.
2. **Humility.** Fasting accompanied by repentance, sorrow for sins and iniquities and intention to seek a more spiritual life.

How do we Fast

3. Fasting & period of abstinence.

- All kinds of fasting have to be practiced by abstaining from food for a period of time, then one eats food free from animal fat.
- The period of abstinence is the foundation of fasting (depriving oneself). Nowadays, you can eat fasting food which is more delicious than regular food. We miss the point of fasting by doing that.
- In judges, that period was until the evening (Jud 20:26). Moses, Nineveh, our Lord didn't taste anything during their fast.

How do we Fast

4. Moderation in fasting:

- Fasting is not obligatory to everyone. This should be discussed with your spiritual father, especially concerning abstinence.

5. Kinds of food: By Tradition & (Ezek 4:9) "Also take for yourself wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt..."

How do we Fast

6. Fasting doesn't weaken the body

- It doesn't have less nutrients, but we get hungry fast because our senses are all centered in our bodies. When our stomach gets empty we feel its emptiness very quickly because we have nothing else to worry about.
- A person who is busy with divine matters doesn't feel the hunger early because the body is not his center of attention. (Ex: Holy Days)
- (Ps 63:4,5) "I will lift up my hands in Thy Name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness."

How do we Fast

7. Fasting & Spiritual Exercises:

- It is a preliminary step towards accomplishing spiritual exercises successfully (keeping silent)

8. Prayer to accompany fasting:

- (Mt. 9:29) They go together (Acts 13:2,3)
(Acts 14:23)

9. Fasting and giving alms:

- Sermon on the mount: 3 basic factors: Prayer, fasting & giving alms.
- Strengthening the hand of the poor and needy (Ezek 16:49) (Isiah 58:6,7)

Conclusion

- Don't give yourself an excuse that you can't fast.
- Don't desire specific kinds of foods
- Consult your father of confession
- If you are sick (body is already subdued by disease) → goal achieved
- Fast not only by food, but also from sin and evil, anger, judgment, lust, etc.
- Meditate while fasting, remembering the occasions
- Make your fast acceptable by presenting it free from evil and hypocrisy.

May God help us to present to Him an acceptable fast and we may benefit from it for the building of our souls, Amen.