

Answer to a Question About

Fasting

QUESTION: Yahshua the Messiah spoke about fasting in Matthew 6:16-18. I would like to know exactly what spiritual values may be realized from fasting, and, if possible, what rewards may be received in connection with prayer and fasting. I am aware that fasting has some therapeutic value in resting the body for a period of time. E. J. M., Maryland

ANSWER: The subject of fasting is complex and various aspects of the doctrine are scattered throughout the sacred Scriptures. Although fasting and prayer are mentioned in the teaching of many religious groups, few of them actually endeavor to implement a program of regular prayer and fasting which Yahshua urged His people to follow while He was here on this earth. The value of such a program is to be seen in biblical passages, and rewards are promised to those who practice it.

First of all, it may be well to consider the specific point you mentioned: the therapeutic value of fasting. Medical science has proven the value of fasting in restoring the body to a healthy condition. Sometimes the function of the organs slows down, and, by resting the digestive tract through fasting, they can recuperate and even eliminate some of the poisons that have backed

by
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up in the system. Fasting will enable the organs to drain off this poison and hasten recuperation. This is most clearly seen in animals who become sick and naturally abstain from eating. In this way, fasting has a decidedly positive physical value where our health is concerned.

But, more importantly, fasting also has a special value in our spiritual lives. As we trace the references to fasting through the Bible, we will become aware of these lessons which we have neglected to perceive in the past. For example, fasting, or abstaining from eating, seems almost a natural thing to do when one feels sad. The body has no appetite for food during times of grief. When the message of King Saul's death was brought to him, David and his men fasted until evening

as a sign of mourning, 2 Samuel 1:11-12. When Queen Esther knew that her people were condemned to be destroyed, she requested that all of the Jews should fast for three days and three nights before she went in to plead with the king to beg for mercy, Esther 4:16. This was a total fast—no food or water. In Psalm 109:22-24, we find that the Psalmist describes this kind of fasting. ***“For I am poor and needy, And my heart is wounded within me. I am gone like the shadow when it declines: I am tossed up and down as the locust. My knees are weak through fasting; And my flesh fails of fatness.”***

Consequently, the Scriptures speak of those times in our lives when our hearts are filled with grief, causing our appetite for food to leave us. This kind of fasting would be a more natural reaction to circumstances in life than merely an abstinence from food that we en-

force upon ourselves for some other reason. It might be considered to be similar to someone who becomes ill and loses his appetite; although, in this case, the loss of appetite results from a sense of deep grief.

Fasting can be an asset in our spiritual growth, since it will strengthen us to resist sin and the attacks of Satan. Notice that Yahshua the Messiah fasted 40 days just after His own immersion, Matthew 4:1-2. When one has been only recently immersed into the Body of Messiah, he only has the strength of a babe. As one young in the Faith, he or she should earnestly seek to grow in grace and knowledge. A program of fasting and prayer with Bible study will feed the individual spiritual food that will strengthen him to meet the trials of life. When Yahshua the Messiah was taken by the Spirit into the wilderness, He was brought into close communion with Yahweh. As one meets with Yahweh, his mind will be on spiritual things, rather than on the desires of the physical body. This is exactly what happened to the three people in the Bible who were great instruments in Yahweh's hands and who fasted 40 days. Moses fasted 40 days twice in his life (Deuteronomy 9:9, 18) when he was in consultation with Yahweh on Mount Sinai. EliYah the prophet was supernaturally fed by the angel of Yahweh and then for 40 days went on the mission to which he had been called, 1 Kings 19:5-9. Along with these two men of Yahweh, Yahshua the Messiah fasted 40 days, and He received the powerful inner strength to endure to the end, becoming our Savior. Certainly, not everyone is required to fast 40 days, but if we fast one day each week for a full year we will have fasted more than the 40 days and we can, thereby, accumulate the same reserve of spiritual stamina that these great men of faith received.

Daniel chapter 9 records a classic prayer of repentance that was made by one of the prophets of Yahweh.

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As Daniel read the book of the prophet Jeremiah, he learned that Yahweh had decreed a period of 70 years judgment upon the people of the southern kingdom and upon the Holy City. He sought Yahweh with all his heart, through prayers and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes, verse 3. Then, Daniel prayed a very moving prayer of repentance, vicariously confessing the sins of his people, and his fervent prayer was accepted by Yahweh. He was given a vision of the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the advent of the Messiah, a great blessing indeed! In chapter 10, Daniel is given another vision and, thereafter, he prayed for 21 days for its interpretation, verses 1-3. After this period of prayer and fasting for 21 days, the interpretation was given to him. This vision was a lengthy one, as recorded for us in chapters 11 and 12.

Consequently, we can see that fasting will bring us closer to Yahweh and it will enlighten us about things to come. When Daniel was

anxious concerning the prophetic vision he saw and asked Yahweh for wisdom, through tears, prayer, and fasting, the answer came from on High, just as Jacob (James) also said it would, Jacob 1:5-8.

Fasting is a necessary sacrifice that an individual can make to declare his or her sincerity to Yahweh when he repents of sin. Joel 1:14 and 2:15 show that Almighty Yahweh will hear a sincere prayer during times of trouble. Yahweh sometimes brings judgment and trouble upon His people, but He will hear their prayers when they engage in a fast. When Jonah preached to the people of Nineveh they believed his message and humbled themselves with a dedicated, special fast, Jonah 3:5-10. Yahweh saw their sincerity and He did not destroy the nation of Assyria. This again was a total fast—no food or water. The people were sorry for their wickedness and they sought to prove it to Yahweh through this voluntary sacrifice of a fast. Thereafter, Yahweh could use the Assyrian nation to punish the errant 10 northern tribes.

An interesting incident occurred during the time of Ezra as the little company of faithful Jews that he had gathered in Babylon were returning to their homeland. This emigrant company sought protection and guidance from Yahweh as they entered enemy territory. They knew their need for direction on the way that they should travel back to their homeland. Ezra explained, ***“Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our Elohim, to seek of him a straight way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to ask of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way, because we had spoken to the king, saying, The hand of our Elohim is upon all them that seek him, for good; but his***

power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. So we fasted and supplicated our Elohim for this: and he was entreated of us,” Ezra 8:21-23.

Many times, when we are in danger from an enemy, or if we are in a battle against Satan, we can set aside a period of fasting and prayer, then we shall receive help from Almighty Yahweh.

Many times ministers will read Matthew 17:14-21, to show the lack of faith among Yahshua’s disciples when they were unable to cast out the evil spirit from a young boy. Yahshua the Messiah rebuked His disciples for lack of faith but ended by saying, ***“But this kind goes not but save by prayer and fasting,”*** verse 21. Without question, Yahshua Himself had the most faith of any human that ever existed and He acted on that faith. He was able to cast out the demon with a verbal command, but even He admitted that some evil spirits would only depart from a person through a program of prayer and fasting. Such a program could take quite some time. Let us see why Yahshua the Messiah made this statement.

There is one day each year on which all of the True Worshipers are instructed to set aside a sacred day for fasting and prayer—the Day of Atonement. Some people think that this day no longer needs to be observed because of the interpretation that has been attached to it by the Jewish commentators. However, we know that it is through the shed blood of the Messiah that our sins are forgiven and not through any works of righteousness that we may do, Titus 3:4-6. When we observe the Day of Atonement we honor the Messiah who was sacrificed for us. We are commanded to afflict our souls on that day, Leviticus 23:27-29. This affliction of the soul is shown to be fasting at other places in the Scriptures, for example, Psalm 35:13. ***“But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth:***

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I afflicted my soul with fasting; And my prayer returned into my own bosom.” The word translated *humbled* (King James Version) means *afflicted*. Please see also Psalm 69:10. Incidentally, the Day of Atonement is mentioned in the New Testament, in Acts 27:9. The apostles apparently continued to observe it after Yahshua’s death.

When we turn back to Leviticus 25:8-13, 17, we can note that the jubilee year begins on the Day of Atonement. On this day, liberty is proclaimed throughout all the land. This day, then, means liberty to all who are oppressed and who have fallen into hard times. Here is a great lesson for us if we can learn it. FASTING MEANS RELEASE that we hope to receive FROM SOME CONDITION OF RESTRAINT, and this concept can be transferred to some physical or mental disability. When we pray or fast for a person who is ill, we are asking for their release from that oppression of Sa-

tan, Acts 10:38. This is the reason why Yahshua the Messiah told His disciples to pray and fast for those who are afflicted, as was the lad in Matthew 17. This thought is carried over into Isaiah 58:2-9, where our program of prayer and fasting should have the welfare of others in view, whether temporal, physical, or spiritual.

Yahshua the Messiah assumes that His disciples will fast at regular intervals. He said in the Sermon on the Mount, ***“Moreover when you fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may be seen of men to fast. Truly I say to you, They have received their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face; that you be not seen of men to fast, but of your Father who is in secret: and your Father, who sees in secret, shall recompense you,”*** Matthew 6:16-18. Many times, religious people fast to appear especially righteous to their surrounding acquaintances. They may even boast about their lengthy fasts. Yahshua said they already have their reward, but that reward is not from Yahweh. It is only the acclaim of men. Yahshua instructed us to pray secretly, to fast secretly, and to give alms without even so much as making a public announcement. We are to do these things to honor Yahweh and not to gain any recognition for ourselves.

The religious leaders of Yahshua’s day fasted self-righteously to gain the esteem of men, but Almighty Yahweh rejected such a personal display of piety. Yahshua the Messiah uses this as an example in Luke 18:12, where one of the self-righteous Pharisees wished to appear better than the publican when he declared: ***“I fast twice in the week...”*** The Bible has commanded that people fast only on ONE DAY EACH YEAR. Then the entire congregation of True Worshipers is required to fast. The Pharisees had added to Yahweh’s

Law by imposing a twice-each-week fasting program between Passover and Pentecost and between Tabernacles and Dedication. This is not scripturally commanded and was not a voluntary fast. It was merely a fast ordained by men, just as are the four fast days of Zechariah 7:5 and 8:19.

Occasionally, people are confronted by problems in life to which they cannot find solutions. Some wish to be of greater service to Yahweh and do not know what He wishes them to do. The answer is to pray and fast, asking Yahweh for guidance. However, don't stop praying and fasting if the answer is not immediately forthcoming. The Assembly of Yahweh at Antioch hoped to do something to aid in spreading the message of salvation more rapidly, so they began a program of prayer and fasting. In Acts 13:2 we find that they ministered to (served) Yahweh and they fasted. The Holy Spirit soon manifested Yahweh's Will to them and urged that the assembly send out Saul and Barnabas to take the message of salvation to others. Then, in verse 3, we find that the entire assembly continued the program until all were convinced that it was definitely Yahweh's plan for these two chosen men to go forth on a missionary journey. Consequently, the elders laid hands on them and they were ordained to carry the message to the people of the surrounding nations. This Apostolic assembly persevered in prayer and fasting and great things happened! It is good to pray and fast so that we may know the Will of Yahweh. If we are faithful and seek to do His Will, He will answer. When He does, you will recognize the hand of Yahweh because of the perfection in the plan He directs.

Although we have not exhausted every Scripture on the subject of fasting that appears in the Bible, we have considered the major points that could be covered. To summarize, we would say that great reward may be received for initiating a program

We may find spiritual guidance through fasting and prayer as we come to know the Will of Yahweh. We may receive a clearer revelation of the plan of salvation, just as did the prophets of Old Testament times, when we fast to show our sincerity to Yahweh and pray for wisdom from on High. We can find protection from the Adversary, Satan the devil, and from our enemies by praying to Yahweh and fasting in humility as we rely on Him to shelter us in times of trouble.

of regular prayer and fasting. First of all, one can gain spiritual strength through fasting regularly as an act of humility. One comes to realize more completely the weakness of the flesh and his own personal spiritual condition when he abstains from food for a period of time. One realizes just how dependent upon nourishment the human mind and body becomes. Fasting will frequently strengthen the mind of a person to resist some form of sin that besets him. The correlation between abstaining from food in a fast and the nourishment of the spiritual life is in direct relationship to each other. In this, the reward for fasting strengthens perseverance.

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In addition, we may find fasting to provide a physical asset in the recuperation of a body growing

steadily weaker from stored-up toxins. A cleansing fast, wherein one drinks plenty of water, will greatly assist in the elimination of such poisonous toxins from the body. When one becomes ill it is a good indication that we are not living in harmony with Yahweh's way of life. The rest that is given our internal organs during a health fast will greatly increase our life span. Experiments that have been done with laboratory animals show that mice which were fed on alternate days will live longer than those that are fed a constant daily diet. It will not be harmful to the body to go without food for a day, even though one might imagine that he will die if he doesn't eat three square meals every day.

Consequently, we can conclude that a regular program of prayer and fasting will bestow upon the True Worshiper both spiritual and physical value in restoring both the physical body and a lackluster spiritual life. It will be helpful in gaining control of our mind and body so that we can draw closer to Yahweh Elohim and be recognized as His child. It will help us to walk carefully in the footsteps of Yahshua the Messiah and to follow the Lamb wherever He goes, Revelation 14:14. □