

The Spiritual Scientist

An ezine for those who think!

Is Fasting Self Torture ?

Question: Spiritual people often fast on certain occasions, thus depriving themselves of natural bodily needs. Isn't such fasting an unnecessary self-torture?

Answer: Not at all.

What
do I
do about
FASTING?



To the contrary, for many people, their daily gorging of food is an unnecessary self-torture. WHO statistics show that over 1 billion people suffer due to obesity, whereas 800 million people suffer due to undernourishment. More health disorders result due to overeating than due to fasting. We eat more often to fulfill the greed of the mind than the need of the body. Due to eating too often and too much, our digestive system becomes like a perpetually overworked machine in desperate need of rest. That's why many alternative cure doctors recommend periodic – fortnightly or monthly – fasting with intake only of liquids so as to rest and flush the digestive system. Though abstaining from food may seem like an infliction of torture for our minds, it may well be a relief from torture for our bodies.

In addition to healing the body, fasting, when done according to scriptural guidance, can also purify the mind and awaken the soul. By analyzing how life and consciousness cannot emerge from dead, unconscious matter, we can intellectually understand that the soul – and not the body – is the real source of life and consciousness. This implies that all of us are actually souls, temporarily occupying material bodies. But how can we transform this intellectual understanding into an experiential realization? Fasting is one important way.



During our normal lives, we pander to the demands of the flesh, thus perpetuating our misidentification with flesh. Consequently, the desires and plans to fulfill our bodily demands preoccupy and fill our minds, leaving little mental room for spiritual contemplation. When we resolve to fast on certain days, we soon realize that if we keep thinking of food while fasting, we will simply be torturing ourselves. This realization gives us the impetus to evict thoughts of food from our minds. Then with the mental room thus created we become free to contemplate on the deeper spiritual dimension of our existence. Is fasting necessary for such contemplation? No, but starving the flesh sharpens the spirit, thus making the spiritual contemplation more intense. During the fasting period, if we lovingly call out to God by chanting his names like the Hare Krishna mahamantra, then we can experience a nonmaterial nourishment far more fulfilling than the most delicious food. This strengthens our realization of our spiritual identity, reinforces our commitment to the path of progressive spiritual advancement and ultimately elevates us to the realm of everlasting devotional delight. Thus, temporary bodily fasting eventually becomes a doorway to eternal spiritual feasting.

