Fasting for the climate and self

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10 September 2007

Culture Change Letter #166, Sept. 12, 2007

The Climate Emergency Fast continues

After fasting over a week now for a cause, the first time I have done such a thing, I wanted to share my progress and reflections with Culture Change readers. Before doing so, here's the origin of this fast: On Sept. 4th the Climate Emergency Fast was begun as Congress came back into session, for the purpose of raising awareness for federal action to enact:

..."a moratorium on any new coal or coal-to-liquid plants; a national freeze on carbon emissions followed by major reductions; and a $25 billion down payment in fiscal year 2008 for conservation, efficiency and renewable energy programs."

This is the agenda of the U.S. Climate Emergency Council, where a champion faster for peace, Ted Glick, has coordinated this campaign whereby over one thousand people from every state in the U.S. did the Sept. 4 fast. Some of us are going longer. Almost everyone can agree with the three-point agenda above. Whether it is enough, and whether the federal government is up to the task, are big questions.

Can there be any doubt about the need for drastic action, when our ice caps are melting, the weather's going haywire, species are trying to migrate to cooler and higher climates, and we just might have succeeded with "progress" toward a mass extinction that could include humanity?

We really need a fast from fossil fuels. To be consistent and thorough, such a fast must include nuke power, clearcutting of forests, consumerism, and wasteful use of resources: water, paper, soil, and metals. When we think about it, everyday things we take for granted -- concrete, glass, hamburgers -- are highly energy intensive. We have developed a culture of materialism that condones greed, exploitation and war for oil. Okay, you might say, agreed. But what can we do about it? What is feasible?

First, it's crucial to distinguish between what we would like to see happen and what will probably happen. It would be nice if there could be a seamless transition to a much cleaner-energy economy, whereby we would not have to make sacrifices or see upheaval. But peak oil has knocked at the door and there is no way out. Climate change has begun and is intensifying out of control. So, we ask, what about renewable energy? Can't that replace the petroleum infrastructure?

The answer is yes, but only spottily. This is because (1) it's not ready on a huge scale (and requires petroleum to implement it), (2), does not have the net-energy advantage of cheap oil that's already mostly gone, and (3) it cannot provide for today's consumer economy that relies on liquid fuels for distributing products such as food (which is grown increasingly with petroleum) -- given present overpopulation. Ten times as many units of petroleum energy go into agribusiness food production as the amount of energy that the produced food contains. Ahh, progress. Oops, did we max out our collective petri dish?

It is for all these reasons that this fast today, and future fasts and other radical action, must dramatize the need to bring attention to those still asleep. Hopefully they will realize that our climate cannot wait for the elusive technofix, nor can we be optimistic about seeing strong legislation that won't be vetoed. It is not just the climate, but our dwindling energy resources that will result in petrocollapse and the breakdown of possibly Western Civilization, that has to be considered in our actions and plans for change. Compromisers on climate action who gloss over the whole truth can be dangerous to the general welfare at a critical juncture, if they are allowed to have a big say, even if they are not pro-coal. Are we at that point?

Al Gore and James Hansen are this country's top climate-change authorities, and both of them have recently come out for civil disobedience on behalf for the climate. If there ever was a point when a peaceful revolution is being signalled, intended or not, this may be it. These two pillars of the establishment, sincere guys I have spoken with, now wonder out loud why young people are not shutting down coal production and its energy generation today. Such a laudable place to get to, but they may soon see the need to go out and get arrested themselves for doing this right now -- even grannies in wheelchairs do such things. Welcome to the real movement, Al and Jim! I believe their evolution must next lead to questioning the technofix which they are all too fond of, given the overall, unknowable threat and the energy realities.

My long fast for the climate and myself

I was raised on fasting to deal with the normal health issues that children encounter. My family's only other tool was relying on organic food and staying away from junk food and drugs. I've never had a vaccination, so I've missed out on the mercury that my body would have to cope with. I also grew up seeing my parents advocate social change for peace and the environment. As a boy my parents had over to dinner some folks who had sailed their boat into a South Pacific atomic-bomb test site to stop the blast. So when I've heard of hunger strikes for peace and justice, these seemed reasonable and not impossible to endure.

I have taken many fasts of various durations, all involving just water. (Some variations, involving certain juices, cayenne pepper, teas, etc., appear to work as well, and some day I'll get around to trying them.) So I have learned about the fasting process, its unpleasant aspects and the enormous benefits. I have witnessed other fasts, met the 20th century fasting authority Herbert Shelton, and have read about fasting. I have communicated with a fasting-doctor at a fasting clinic. I have also noted the limits of humans' ability to go without food, reading about hunger strikers in Irish jails who lasted just over 50 days before starving to death.

I refer the reader to my previous fasting treatise; link at the bottom of this article.

The fast is a time for complete physiological rest. It is not a time for going to work or school or driving a car, but mainly the rest applies to your internal systems. Have you thought of your body as not getting total rest when it constantly has to process your meals, substances ingested including environmental toxins? When the digestion system can turn off, the heart no longer has to pump gallons of blood for every portion of food you have consumed. And if you have ailments, the body is that much more stressed to properly digest. On top of this, many of us combine foods haphazardly which does not permit efficient or pleasant digestion.

The rest during fasting involves slowing down involuntarily and helplessly, such that it is a meditative experience. Stress is ill advised, and happens to be something we did not evolve with on today's levels. One notices one's environment more sharply, and appreciates nature more. I've noticed that one's favorite music becomes extra clear, with all the subtleties revealed both harmonically and lyrically. The humor of the Beatles' Revolver album was never obvious to me until I played it on the twelfth day of a fast. Today I've been laughing out loud at recordings I've played before and did not fully appreciate. But my energy is not yet back up to playing my own funny songs or making up new ones.

Many recoil at the thought of any pain or unpleasantness, and will avoid it for the short-term. When they rule out fasting because they might feel hunger or vomit out some toxins, they're saying, in effect, that they'd rather remain full of toxins and put up with sub-par level of health. Now, if they could eliminate the toxins through the Master Cleanse (see notes at end of article), and better yet, change their lifestyle so that they no longer abuse their body with commuting, smoking, eating schwag corporate "food," and taking estrogenic plastics into their systems, then it's okay to forego the intense, quick detoxification and immunity-raise that fasting alone accomplishes. But when the organism sweeps under the rug symptoms and the need to detoxify and raise immunity, I believe this is how life-threatening and chronic diseases can set in. They don't hit us randomly.

Immunity and toxicity are like a teeter totter: when one goes down the other side must be up. It is our choice how we wish the balance to be, and to be safe: when toxicity is high and immunity low, crash is the result. This is commonly blamed on "genetics" or "family history" which are not the determining factor in my view.

I get into intense elimination right away. When in jail for three days for the crime of riding my bike in a protest for the ancient redwoods being clearcut in 1996, I fasted. I did not want that suspect jail food. I vomited on the third day. When I bailed myself out for $10,000 -- only because a deputy sheriff had a fixation on capturing my activist daughter who therefore went into hiding -- I proceeded to fast another day to eliminate the probable tainted water of the old jail building's maximum security section. At least the jail had excellent books. I think I was the only one of us thirteen bicyclist "threats to society" who fasted in that cell block.

Through my breath, which is powerfully bad at this phase, and my vomit and urine, it seems I must be eliminating toxins that include plastics, heavy metals, pesticides, etc. But no one seems to have tested the excretions of a faster; there's a lot of it to test and it smells pretty noxious. My mother, 87, observed yesterday that it's surprising that such analysis has not been done yet to our knowledge. She tried fasting recently, but at her hospice/nursing home her changed condition was interpreted as owing to some intestinal blockage so she landed in the hospital for excruciating tests. Indeed, Western medicine interprets fasting's elimination, or the body's rejection of food, as sickness in itself that must be attacked. However, let's admit that medical science has incredible expertise that can come in handy, whether one has abused one's health to the point of needing heroic intervention or when one has gotten into a serious accident.

So, drugs are employed to suppress symptoms, and this is assumed to be relief. The distraction of a foreign substance does make the body forget about the part of the body that was crying out. But the body wants to continue to rebel and expel toxins that must come out. Many medical doctors do realize that mucus is a good thing to get rid of. But in general, symptoms -- whether early, mild ones, or advanced alarm-bells that signal the body is in desperate need of

healing without interference or distraction of unwanted food or drugs -- are not understood nowadays as blessings in disguise.

When we respect the signs that our bodies give us on health, it is a blessing and should not be ignored. It's like turning off the dashboard light to no longer see the engine's over-heat light, just so we can keep going. This analogy goes with the erroneous approach of Western medicine that treats the body as if it is a car with a faulty part -- just treat the part, or take out the part, and even replace it, and presto, good health is supposed to result. But what about getting at the root cause? Well, that's not very profitable and we are not a society good at taking the time to cure fundamental ills. We react as best we can to crises, not always with good results.

With my experience and confidence in this field, even though I have no diploma, I can speak accurately about my own feelings when I go on a fast and finish it. A fast is a cycle, whose length can seldom be anticipated. The only guideline is that younger and thinner people take less time. There is unpleasantness in the beginning involving some hunger, but the unpleasantness is often the sensation of the symptoms that may have prompted one to fast, such as a flu. Pain goes away after few meals missed, fortunately, and then the middle period of more intense elimination kicks in. One's saliva tastes worse, strength has ebbed further, time starts to crawl, one is incapable of usual habits and pursuits, and vomiting may occur. As George Harrison sang in the Beatles' Savoy Truffle, "What tastes sweet now turns so sour."

This period lasts as long as the body needs, and when it passes there is more energy to enjoy, but not much. One is still listless and perhaps pining for food. Water may be unpleasant to touch and drink. (I find that bubbly mineral water, in glass, is very pleasant.) The next phase is higher energy, perhaps involving some unhurried walks in nature, and an anticipation of breaking the fast. But the body is still eliminating. Any experienced fasting coach will point out indications of not being ready to terminate the fast, such as the tongue is still white. But the time to eat is very clear when energy and happiness have returned in spades, and eyes are very clear, the breath good, and one is no longer talking about what food to break the fast on (or what favorite restaurant to eventually enjoy). Joy and health are an exuberance to savor.

Why not feel one's best? I look forward to it, a feeling that few enjoy who are not in tip-top health. What's the reason for foregoing it? Besides the urge to keep shoveling in the food even when our taste buds have waned and we need more salt, spice and sugar to make food interesting, the biggest reasons are the cloud of ignorance maintained by the Western medical establishment and even more tragically the lack of freedom people have to take the needed rest to get their health back. Instead, quick fixes are all we allowed, so we can get back on the battlefield to serve The Man.

Understandably, such a "foreign idea" as foregoing food is something the average American wants to avoid, especially when one learns there can be vomiting and listlessness while waiting for detoxification to run its course. But, how foreign should fasting really appear, when we have the word breakfast in our daily vocabulary? Or, the example of Jesus fasting 40 days? These clues indicate that fasting is a very old and tested method to be respected. Turns out that it is in capitalist U.S. medical territory that fasting is most unknown and feared. There are few fasting clinics here, and fasting is done by diverse people in isolation. But in other countries fasting clinics are much more common, and these societies do not share our broken health-care system.

Western medical practice relies on treatments -- with knives, drugs and radiation -- that indeed bring some results, but they are denial of the body's ability to heal itself naturally. Rarely are the conditions for healing maximized or respected. And, we must keep in mind, these treatments are what's paying the high bills of the capitalists in the medical establishments -- how could fasting be a cash cow or profit center that would pad their pockets and portfolios nearly so well?

It's not just Western medical practice that tries to substitute treatments for healing. When we look at the health products industry, and even the healing professions such as acupuncture, massage, herbalism, etc., these "modalities" are usually substitutes for the necessary basis for really effective, quicker healing: detoxifying the body and raising immunity.

The Climate Emergency Fast is not only a great tactic for getting people's attention for a cause, but also to draw attention to the healing potential of fasting. On the deepest level, beyond the "sacrifice" and awe-inspiring act of doing something strange by fasting, is healing: the Earth and humans are in dire need of it.

Dr. Herbert Shelton, a Texan, the most well known fasting authority of the 20th century, was invited by Mahatma Gandhi (a faster) to come to India.

In my decades of advocating fasting, I have helped several people do long fasts that they all started on their own volition. Interestingly, they were all activist, artistic, young women. Could it be that this portion of the population has the most courage and stamina for our times? Not having done it before, they had a longer detoxification period and fast than I've ever had to do myself. One had pesticide exposure in orchards during her childhood; another had art-supply toxicity over years as part of her work.

What is of greater concern to me than the few numbers of people who are really open to fasting, is the greater number of

people who have their diverse reasons for refusing to fast and even refuting fasting for anyone (tell it to Jesus and Gandhi!). There can be an infinite number of reasons that people invent or repeat, in fear, for why fasting is a bad idea for just them, or for anyone. I have heard them say fasting "damages the brain," plays havoc with blood sugar levels, makes you live on released toxins, and destroys muscle tissue. I have also heard that fasting is okay for "only four days maximum" and not okay for this or that disease. All sorts of objections, invented and likely invalid entirely, are thrown up for why fasting with water only for more than a few days would be a bad idea. These objections are always from those ignorant of fasting, and not by those proficient and knowledgeable, in my experience.

However, these objections have never been actually observed or measured, to my knowledge. When I point out that I've never seen a negative reaction to a fast in all my experience or research, except for when someone breaks a fast prematurely and stupidly on processed foods or large quantities of food, this goes in one ear and out the other. The objection for fasting often takes the form of one's tolerance of it in general, but "not for me. It does not work, and I have a special condition." I submit that this is fear-based and not confirmed by a fasting doctor or any real analysis. The person prefers to go through life in a toxin-laden state, suffering needlessly and not looking his or her best. This fear or denial of fasting is even carried to the point of death.

So-called terminal diseases are not given a chance under Western medicine to bring to bear the healing power of the organism and nature. Instead, the "patient" gets weaker -- on the drugs, surgeries and radiation, as well as on the non-organic, overcooked hospital plastic-tainted "food" supplied by Halliburton -- and eventually dies. Did that in any way support the idea that fasting was the wrong approach? I ask, what did the person have to lose to try a fast? At some point, it is too late to turn around a "terminal" patient with a fast or series of fasts. (However, a final fast to the death is an often pain-free way to "check out," as demonstrated by nature authors Helen and Scott Nearing.) But, it would be worth a try to heal "terminal patients" "hygienically," as Shelton called fasting. Statistically there is little information on survival rates through fasting, as medical doctors dismiss as "flukes" unexpected healing.

The body seems to do three basic things (besides walk and talk and specific acts): digest, engage in sex or reproduction, and heal. These critical functions cannot go all at once. They are best done separately in order to be done right. Or, tell me how your lover reacted when you reached for a handful of potato chips when in the throes of passion. There is a time for healing and healing alone, and that's fasting.

The outcome results in a stronger physical specimen at the correct weight for one's height, if the fast is followed up by eating most carefully. The duration of the latter must go on as long as the fast itself, as healing and rebuilding take place. After that you'll be invulnerable to a beer and pizza. But your addictions to any substances including sugar will have disappeared. And you didn't have to pay any practitioners or be hypnotized. Even a short, abbreviated fast has great benefits, such as knocking out one's allergies, even if the whole elimination process is not possible to see on through.

Do yourself a favor and clean yourself out and purge yourself of evils, and enjoy hightened, relaxed awareness. A healthy mind goes with a healthy body. Cleansing and purifying yourself fits well with fasting from petro-products and getting rid of that addiction. This is everyone's responsibility in a climate-distorted, post-petroleum future that some of us realize is already upon us. And, knowing how to fast, when times ahead might entail deprivation and shortages of food, may help you survive when others not familiar with missing meals may not cope nearly as well. Be well.

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Climate Emergency Fast (features daily blog and state locater of fasters, and more)

climateemergency.org

Fasting for healing and inner peace (with links):

culturechange.org/e-letter-Fasting92.html

Pledge for Climate Protection:

culturechange.org/global_warming_pledge.html

Global Warming Crisis Council listserve:

email Wanda Ballantine
the "Raging Grannie," to sign up: wsb70@comcast.net

"Al Gore, James Hansen, and Civil Disobedience", by Gordon Clark, September 1, 2007

zmag.org

Fast for Peace, part of Green October (Seattle)

greenoctober2007.com

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