Day 4 of the Fast for Haiti

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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I've been fasting since Friday night, January 15, I've had only water. A growing number of people are doing the same, sending the money they would have spent on food to Haiti relief organizations. We think this action can do more for those in great need than just provide the dollars we free up: solidarity and a sense of sacrifice are called for at this time, after the ravages of the strong earthquake and the many years of injustices perpetrated against the poor of Haiti.

I want to describe the fasting experience, for those who do not know. It is not a matter of feeling hungry. Rather it's a feeling of unpleasant elimination of toxins, at least for much of the fast.

When the process is over, which one can easily tell by the surge in energy and happiness, with no more symptoms of any ill health, the unpleasantness is remembered as a necessary cleansing of the entire organism. There is some hunger during a fast, more so at the very beginning. Real hunger returns when the end of the fast has been reached and one feels gloriously and pleasantly hungry.

But the taste in one's mouth from strong mucus demanding to come out of the throat, and vomiting up more toxins, are the main unpleasantness of the fast. Not having much energy for running or other exercise is also a downside of fasting -- at least until the point is reached when eating is called for, and much energy is available even without yet breaking the fast.

Some are reluctant to fast because the thought of eliminating toxins and feeling unpleasant is too daunting. But the alternative is to hold the toxins in. Isn't it nice to get rid of the residues of plastics, for example, and possibly avoid cancer?

As someone raised on fasting, and having seen wonderful success through this most ancient method of healing, I believe that you cannot heal without detoxifying through the rest afforded by fasting. Giving your digestive system a break, which means saving the work of the heart for healing rather than digesting, is more effective and faster than any other form of health-pursuit that I know or have heard of. Notice I don't compare fasting to "treatments." While treatments can be effective, our problem with health is mostly due to assuming that paying for or taking a certain treatment, or series of treatments, is tantamount to obtaining health. Without real healing, good health is elusive and cannot be bought. Rather, cleaning up your act and changing life-style is the way to allow the body to heal itself. This is the most natural form of healing -- from within.

Putting medicated goo on acne, taking a painkiller, or buying no end of "natural" supplements cannot substitute for the healing from within that results from fasting. Fasting is not the only way to achieve it, when a special diet (e.g., the Master Cleanse) can be quite effective. But such methods, including important changes in lifestyle -- stopping the long commute, eschewing fast food, etc. -- are slower than a complete fast.

When any calories are taken, even just some lemon in herbal tea, this interrupts the fast to some extent and puts the digestive system and heart on duty. A busy heart is essential for digestion, as many quarts of blood are pumped for digesting a small meal.

Slowing down for a time of healing is not a bad thing. Time crawls when fasting, partly because one wants to feel better and do normal things. But fasting is also a meditative time, when one thinks about his or her life and what has created the need to fast. For example, the past delights of having some fresh white bread and excellent coffee are now seen and felt differently. For these quasi-foods, when ingested often, harm the health and are a substitute for real nutrition such as whole grain and herbal teas. One realizes this more on a fast, because the craving for substances such as sugar, alcohol, caffeine, etc. goes away soon after a fast is begun. In fact, the easiest way to kick these addictive substances, including cigarettes, is to fast. And jaded taste buds are banished as simple foods taste amazing as never before. Food should be a sacred experience. After all, we are taking in living matter to live.

It is essential to break the fast carefully, eating only one fresh food at a time, with quantity limited (e.g., one orange). Gradually, depending on the length of the fast, combinations and quantity are increased. If you fasted ten days, the next ten are crucial for careful eating and avoiding stress, such that only on the tenth day of eating would it be safe to eat pizza and have a beer. If such a meal or overeating were to be happen prematurely, healing seems to shut down, and there can be unpleasant sensations or symptoms. This is especially true of children.

The benefits of the fast show up either immediately or gradually, such as skin clearing up quickly, or, in my case, after an 18-day fast my sight improved several weeks after the fast. i stopped needing reading glasses, and that was almost five years ago.

One saves money by not eating, needless to say. For an activist or anyone else struggling to pay essential bills, this is an attraction of the occasional fast. However, when one is not eating, the usual work routine must be set aside, so that healing can occur. Similarly, privacy is needed for anyone fasting, because someone else may become concerned over the fasting, especially when the elimination of toxins causes sounds and smells that can worry the uninitiated. If one is left alone, or better yet aided by an experienced coach, the completion of a fast -- seeing the whole cycle through, of eliminating toxins until they are gone -- results in amazed reaction by those seeing the change. The faster is thinner, yes, but rejuvenated and joyful. Weight is put on slowly, in a healthy way, such that an underweight person prior to fasting can finally get up to a normal, healthy weight.

No combination of drugs or surgeries produces anything like a good fast. In fact, they deal the body a tough blow to manage, as they are foreign substances for the body to reject. It is the body's attempt to reject them that results in various effects that can be felt as relief. Western medicine does have some amazing knowledge and methods, but they are most effective with emergency treatments. The average medical doctor is unschooled in nutrition. Fasting, of course, is frowned upon by mainstream society under the strong influence of Western medicine. Ignorance surrounds fasting in the dominant culture, partly because the medical establishment can make no money on fasting. Rather, the trend has been to find more diseases and more drugs for them, with side effects considered unavoidable and acceptable. A lot of money is made, and the nation's health does not improve.

So when we think of the Haitians' plight, as we fast and give up our food-money for the duration, we are healing ourselves. A healthy person is of more help to others.

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To sign up for the fast and be listed among participants on our website and in emailed lists, contact me at jan "at" culturechange.org. Background on the Fast for Haiti is at Fast for Haiti to Raise $ for Aid and, for the Participants' List, at culturechange.org.