

FASTING AS A HOLISTIC HEALTH DISCIPLINE: INSIGHTS FROM CLASSICAL YOGIC PHILOSOPHIES AND SKY YOGA

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Abstract

Fasting (Unna Nonpu) is a tradition followed across various religions and cultures. It is a method practiced to increase physical power, expel waste products, cure diseases, and control the mind. Fasting is essential for maintaining the body's balanced system. The practice of using the air/space element as medicine is called Fasting. Machines run continuously, but are stopped occasionally for cleaning and maintenance. Similarly, a person who eats regularly undertakes fasting to give the digestive organs some rest. It is understood that by observing a fast suitable for one's situation, age, body, and mind, the body's waste products can be completely expelled, physical health can be protected, and aging can be postponed.

Introduction

The method of using the air/space element as medicine is called Fasting (Unna Nonpu). Machines run continuously but are stopped occasionally for cleaning and maintenance. Similarly, a person who eats regularly undertakes fasting to give the digestive organs some rest. Instead of rest, it is better to call it an interval. The digestive organs use the fasting period to burn off the toxins or accumulated fats within them. If a person chooses a day to fast based on their environment and work, the stomach and the diseased organs are rested if the body is afflicted by illness. Therefore, giving rest to the stomach is essential. When abstaining from food for health reasons, consuming plenty of water is essential.

The Necessity of Fasting

Fasting is known by various names such as Unna Nonpu, Paṭṭini (starvation), and 'Fasting'. When fasting is observed, all waste products that may be present in the body are expelled. Fasting is not a direct medicine. Fasting cannot directly cure any disease. However, fasting is capable of removing the toxins from the body that are the root cause of diseases. Starvation does not mean completely abstaining from eating.

Fasting means avoiding foods that provide only fat and strength in the food we consume. During fasting, first, the fat substances dissolve. After that, the stored carbohydrate substances (glycogen) and protein substances dissolve and mix into the body. This process continues until a quarter of the body weight is reduced. Due to the reduction of body toxins, very severe diseases are cured by fasting. Fasting halts chemical processes. It is evident that fasting is extremely indispensable for survival. For those who eat excessively, the only way to achieve balance in chemical reactions is to abstain from food. Fasting brings balance to conditions like acidity in the stomach, and the burning of intestinal cells due to indigestion.

Fasting Observances

To prevent disease in humans, our ancestors observed certain days as fasting days in all months. Because fasting (Unna Nonpu) is generally difficult to understand, it was followed as special holy days (Virata days) focusing on God in a devotional context. However, the objective of observing all those fasts was to expel waste products from our bodies, acquire the necessary energy, and cure diseases. Through this, all minor physical ailments are cured.

“The ancients carefully understood the nature of time and the discipline of life.

They observed specific days according to the movements of the moon and the rhythms of nature. On such days, they practiced restraint, self-control, moderation in food, and meditation.

They did not allow diseases to dominate their lives.

They lived with discipline, simplicity, and awareness of bodily balance.

They clearly understood what constituted loss and gain in life
and lived without confusion, guided by wisdom and restraint.” (Gna. K. 1: Pa-933)

They understood the dietary restrictions and benefits associated with observing fasts on days like Amāvāsyā, Pournami (Full Moon), Ekadaṣi, Kiruttikai, Caturtti, Sastī, Adivratam, and Friday Guru Viratam. After observing the fast on festival days, they would offer items like Pongal, Vaḍai, Cundal, Kūḷ Type, Aval, Mulikai Tirtham (Herbal drink), Puḷicatam (Tamarind rice), Takkaḷicatam (Tomato rice), Tayircatam (Curd rice) to God and then distribute them. It is known that such fasts not only provide spiritual contemplation to the mind but also grant health benefits to the body.

Purification Therapy Medicine (Purgative drugs)

When fasting, a purging medicine can be consumed to cleanse the intestine. During fasting, heat increases in the body and especially in the large intestine. At such times, it is best to expel the waste products because the body absorbs the blood present in the waste matter. It is best to use castor oil or other natural types of purgatives. This is very important when observing a fast for curing a disease.

Types of Fasting

Generally, fasting is observed in various types. Notably, these include:

- Complete Fasting,
- Partial Fasting, and
- Small Fasting

i) Complete Fasting

Abstaining from food for an entire day is Complete Fasting. When fasting completely for one day, the body completely expels all waste products that may be present within it. Due to this, the body receives a renewed feeling.

ii) Partial Fasting

Abstaining from food for two mealtimes and taking food only once.

iii) Small Fasting

Consuming only water-based diets like porridge (kuḷ) or only milk and fruits. Fasting is also observed for a week or ten days. This involves completely excluding processed foods and eating only natural foods. Fasting should be observed after receiving consultation from a nature cure doctor, tailored to one's age, the nature of the disease, and body structure. People who are sick, pregnant women, the elderly, and children should avoid fasting.

iv) One-Week Fasting

On the first day of starting the fasting, it is best to abstain from even water. On the second day, water can be consumed. On the third day, consuming lemon water mixed with water cleanses the intestine. On the fourth day, tender coconut water, fruit juice, vegetables, and greens can be consumed. On the fifth day, fruits, vegetables, and coconut can be eaten directly. During the days of the fast, some people may experience stomach problems, dizziness, vomiting, or eye redness. After three days, the body begins to naturally examine itself. All waste products are expelled, and the body receives new power and vitality.

God provides life energy to the body during the fasting. If symptoms like dizziness arise in the body, consuming tender coconut water and honey will cause the disease to leave the body. Disease resistance power will increase. The body will gain renewed strength. Regarding this, Aranga Siṇivasan says: “All that was said with clarity turned into nectar of merit, Will it not be an injury to me, when lowered at the end? The ancients cried that without the attainment of the soul, there is fasting, I only consumed water, excluding other things.” (Aranga Siṇivasan. Aruṭkavi. Manita Deyvam **Gandhi Katai : P-228**)

Once natural food is followed, the organs in the body are purified, and impurity is expelled. When natural food is consumed completely, impurity disappears completely, and the body begins to smell good. When food is forgotten and fasting is observed, the bowels and intestines become empty. The space where food substances are digested and are empty is what we call 'air/space' (Akasam).

“Akasam (Space/Air) is very subtle. It serves as a rare medicine, helping to activate the Pranic energy and purify the body. Fasting is fundamentally structured to remove the toxins that cause disease from the body. It is true that fasting serves as a tool to give relief to the body's operating system and regulate and balance the body's function.” (Vethathiri Maharishi, Uḍal Uyir Maṇam: P-119)

Mental Impact of Fasting

- Body and mind become refreshed and energetic.
- Unwanted internal fat dissolves, and body weight decreases.
- Waste products and toxins are expelled from the body, and the excretory organs are cleansed.
- Blood circulation, heat circulation, and air circulation in the body become balanced.
- The onset of disease is prevented.
- Body and mind are purified, and peaceful spiritual contemplation is elevated.
- Kidneys and gall bladder work well.
- Nervous system-related diseases are cured.
- Fruit juice nutrients strengthen the heart.
- Body organs and mind receive good rest.
- If disease occurs in the body, food should be taken as medicine. During the night, consuming more fruits is very special. One should avoid eating less food in the morning and excessive food at night. One should consume only fruits at least once a month for one day. These expel waste products and pave the way for physical health.

Fasting and the Mind

Fasting is very suitable for the heart/mind. It can give peace to the mind. If the senses are controlled, the mind can be controlled. In fasting, the senses are controlled. Through them, the mind attains peace and helps to shine with clear thoughts. Furthermore,

For the living beings, innumerable varieties of foods are seen everywhere;

Among the many sufferings, only two truly exist:

One is attachment to eating, and the other is disease.

Such is the wealth called the body;

Even those who possess it have realized through experience that

Purity of mind brings inner happiness and well-being.

Recognizing this special discipline,

We have come to know it as the sacred “Ramzan fasting” (**Gna.Ka. 1: Pa-525**)

Thus, Maharishi speaks about the greatness of the fasting. Islamic devotees, who understood what the suffering of hunger is like, observe the Ramzan fasting every year. In this period, they break the fasting is completed. Though understanding the suffering cause by hunger, they recognize the high virtue of providing food to all creatures with a divine consciousness and practice it. They break the fast once fasting period is completed.

Thiru Valluvar in the Kural mentions the severity of hunger, saying that when a person is extremely hungry, the feeling of hunger is like the churning of fire in the stomach. Whatever disease comes, and whatever medicine is taken, observing these (fasts) is essential. Elders have stated that starvation is the best medicine and fasting is the ultimate medicine. It is understood that if any disease affects the body normally, changes in diet are necessary. The food a person eats should itself be the medicine that can cure their disease.

Effects of Fasting on the Body

By abstaining from food for a few days, the body organs attain purity. Hands and feet move well, and eyesight gains clarity. The ear gains the ability to hear well. During fasting, fat substances in

the body dissolve. After that, the stored carbohydrate substances (glycogen) and protein substances dissolve and mix into the body. By reducing the body's toxins, even the most severe diseases can be removed through fasting. The fatigue and weakness experienced during fasting are not due to the absence of food. It is the waste matter in the body that is responsible. Fasting causes renewal not only in the body organs but also in physical activities. During fasting, the body rests. All organs find peace. Nervous tension disappears. The temperature changes and coolness occurs. By remaining without food for a few days, aging is delayed. Acidity and decay in the stomach are removed. Fasting stops some chemical reactions. Due to this, a state of balance is created.

When Food is considered as medicine, one can live without disease. In today's living environment, lack of rest, outdated food, change in eating habits, etc. are the cause of many health problems. The truth is that being immersed in the fast food culture is the cause of many types of disease.

Any disease can be cured if it is noticed at the beginning. but if it delayed and become severe, one will face great suffering. Therefore, they emphasized health by saying that we should prevent it before it occurs. No matter what the disease is, there is a root cause for it. When we know them and change the appropriate medicines or diet. We can completely get rid of the disease. This is what Thiruvalluvar refers to us,

“The action of the mouth that relieves the disease from the disease” (Kural:948). Taking medicine or changing the diet according to the disease, fasting and fasting are considered very important.

Guidelines for Breaking a Fast

Immediately after completing the fast, one should not eat hard foods. It is good to eat only vegetables and fruits that are very light and easily digestible. First, one can drink apple or fruit juice mixed with water. Then, non-acidic broth, steamed wheat porridge, or steamed vegetables can be consumed as food. It is good to gradually increase the amount of food until returning to the regular diet. It is understood that because the human body's stomach would have shrunk during the fast, giving it small, light foods gradually before eating digestible foods allows the body to achieve a state of balance.

Conclusion

It is food that provides complete energy for the human body to function. Fasting is indispensable for the human's mental growth and spiritual progress. Food is fundamental for energy production in the body, for cell growth, and for organs to function healthily. It is food that determines the balanced growth change in the body. When the body is unhealthy, human life becomes miserable. When healthy foods are consumed, the body can live without disease. Food plays a major role in physical health and in living as energetic and decisive human beings. Fasting shines as an unparalleled tool that gives relief to the body's operating system and helps to purify it.

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