

The Importance of Fasting for a particular planet(s)

The Importance of Fasting (Vrata)

In all religions fasting is considered very important. In Hinduism it's the essence of life. All the religious ceremonies are preceded by a period of fasting. The meaning of fasting is to reach the heavens and also to fulfill one's desires. By fasting, one's inner self is purified and one enjoys sound health, removes impending difficulties and incidents that can be avoided. The term UPAVAAS is also accredited to fasting. UPAVAAS is made from two words UPA – near and VAAS means sitting down. Therefore Upavaas means an auspicious day and time when one sits down near to God in devotion. Long life, good health, intelligence, devotion, and purity are attained by one's fasting.

Fasting can be classified into three types:-

KAAIKA VRATA – (Physical fasting):- entails abstaining from any food for the entire day or having just one vegetarian meal in the evening after sunset or eating just fruits for the day.

VAACHIK VRATA – (Speech fasting):- entails speaking the truth, speaking sparingly, melodiously, or the abstinence from speech.

MAANASIKA VRATA – (Fasting for the mind):- entails simplicity, non-violence, restraint, celibacy, friendliness.

When one consumes heavy foods, the blood circulation is accelerated towards the digestive organs, on account of which blood circulation to the head gets decreased after food is consumed and so you feel sleepy and the thinking faculty practically ceases to function. Hence, there is no advantage in giving the physical system work on days you want to perform devotional service unto God. There is a necessity to give the physiological system some rest once in a while. It may be over-worked due to a little over-eating or indiscretion in diet. The underlying principle behind fasting is to be found in Ayurveda. This ancient Indian medical system sees the basic cause of many diseases as the accumulation of toxic materials in the digestive system. Regular cleansing of toxic materials keeps one healthy. By fasting, the digestive organs get rest and all body mechanisms are cleansed and corrected. A complete fast is good for health, and the occasional intake of warm lemon juice during the period of fasting prevents the flatulence. Since the human body, as explained by Ayurveda, is composed of 60% liquid and 40% solid, like the earth, the gravitational force of the moon affects the fluid contents of the body. It causes emotional imbalances in the body, making some people tense, irritable and violent. Fasting acts as an antidote, for it lowers the acid content in the body which helps the devotee to retain their sanity. One who dry fasts (i.e. abstains from consuming water) should break fast the next morning approximately one hour after sunrise with a mixture of 50-50 hot milk and water sweetened with sugar. The effects of this drink loosen the toxins in the intestines where all the toxins have been absorbed during the fast. This expels the toxins within ½ hr.

The whole idea about fasting is to abstain from salt. Why you may ask???

Fasting in Hinduism indicates the denial of the physical needs of the body for the sake of spiritual gains. Salt is an integral part of our diet. Abstaining from salt is a huge sacrifice. It is common knowledge that excess salt (sodium) causes hypertension or elevation of blood pressure. Since the point of a fast is to make things better, and not worse in one's life, one should fast according to one's capacity and circumstances. The best fast is to abstain from everything, including from water, but if one's physical condition will not permit this, then one should rather not try this method. The next best is to consume water only, and the next on fruits only. Thereafter we enter the realm of mono-diets; some of these are inclusive (e.g. milk only), while others are exclusive (e.g. no salt). In this day of age its very difficult for most to abstain from water so the next best thing is to abstain from salt.

The main idea about fasting for a particular planet (graha) is to abstain from something that very important and dear to our body viz. SALT. When one consumes *** “added salt” on a day that a particular planet is malevolent towards one (due to one's past karma), then that deity becomes like a magnet to create obstacles on that's person's path and has all the reason to send his malefic rays to that individual and thus creating many obstacles in that person's life. On the other hand if one doesn't have “added salt” in his foods on that particular day that, that planet is malefic towards him/her, then that planet cannot harm that person in any way. So now you can see how important it is not to consume salt on that day. Hence “added Salt” in foods are avoided as far as possible.

***** What is “added salt”?**

In a bid to assist those aspirants who are undertaking a specific vrat (fast) to abstain from salt or those who simply for health reasons have chosen to decrease or eliminate salt from their diets we have provided a list of ingredients (the next article) which are “almost salt (sodium)” free. Most of our recipes are free from onion and garlic but this is optional and if you choose so, you can add them. So “Added Salt” is adding salt to one's ingredients while cooking.

The question will be raised by some or maybe many, it's not possible to totally eradicate salt from one's diet as many foods has Natural Salts? Yes this is correct, it would be ideal for the aspirant to refrain from any foods or even liquids, but in this modern fast-paced hectic lifestyles that many lead it's not possible for the majority of the populace to follow. Sodium occurs naturally in most foods. The most common form of sodium is sodium chloride, which is table salt. Table salt consists of 40 percent sodium; the amount of natural sodium in foods varies. These include most vegetables and salad items (potatoes, carrots, spinach, lemons, beets, celery...), peanuts, other types of nuts and dairy products such as milk, non-vegetarian foods. While they don't have an abundance of natural sodium, eating these foods does add to your overall sodium intake. Hence one should refrain from adding salt to the servings.

*** SO WE CAN DEDUCE FROM THE LITTLE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO ABSTAIN FROM SALT IN THE STRICTEST SENSE UNLESS ONE OBSERVES A DRY FAST FOR THE DURATION OF THE VRATA – AS EVEN WATER MAY CONTAIN SOME TRACES OF SODIUM (SALT).

So one should rather observe the vrata concentrating on one's prayers at hand then rather on the foods to consume. We do not wish to argue the merits of the various approaches but we provide this information as a guide to allow individuals to decide which option to exercise.

SALT SUBSTITUTES:-

*** **FASTING SALT:-** In South African Prayer shops I have come across “Fasting salt” (a.k.a. Rock Salt or Sendha Namak). Remember although Rock Salt is really very beneficial for one's health as compared to the mass produced salt that we find on tables today, STILL it's salt hence can't be used in the preparations below.

*** **Seaweed granules** are also marketed as alternatives to salt for the future. However, various diseases and medications may decrease the body's excretion of potassium, thereby increasing the risk of potentially fatal hyperglycaemia. People with kidney failure, heart failure or diabetes should not use salt substitutes without medical advice. A manufacturer, “LoSalt”, has issued an advisory statement that people taking the following prescription drugs should not use a salt substitute: amiloride, triamterene, Dytac, captopril & other angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors, spironolactone, aldactone, eplerenone, and Inspra.

POINTS TO PONDER OVER:- Many who observe a planetary/Graha fast do not perform the fast in the correct manner and that's why when the fast is complete there's still no improvement. The reason for this is that people are told that they must firstly fast from sunrise of the day of the fast to sunset of the (same) day of the fast. Now this is incorrect as the fast starts from sunrise and ends sunrise the following morning hence the fast for a particular planet should be for 24 hours and not 12 hours. And secondly they abstain from meat and not salt. Now this is incorrect. I have heard on numerous occasions “Oh I am fasting today”, but when I inquire from them they say they are not eating meat. This is the so-called Indian way of fasting and is totally incorrect.

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