

SOCIO-MEDIO-ETHICAL PERISCOPE OF FASTING AND PRAYER IN HEALING SYNDROME IN CHRISTIAN FAITH

BY

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Abstract

This paper is geared towards examining fasting and prayer that cuts across religious and mystical movements and cultures. The Christian believers in dire need have resorted to anything in the name of prayer and fasting as a solution to problems. Consequently, scholars have either ignore the danger or challenges that associated with excruciating pains in the spiritual exercise. Basic ideas such as homeostasis of the body, nutritional elements and processes are illustrated in this work concerning the effects of the disturbed food and fluid intake into the body. There are clinical periscopes of the break-down of the body's regulatory mechanisms. The socio-medical effects of lack of certain essentials nutrients manifest on the body and the brain in persistence prolonged fasting and prayer in Christian faith. This paper will discuss on socio-medio-ethical aspect on the subject matter. The nature of this research calls for experiential observation, documentary and historical analyses of literary sources. A combination of these methods is very useful for data collection.

Keywords: socio-medio-Ethical, homeostasis, metabolism, healing and faith.

Introduction

Fasting is abstinence from food, drinks and other forms of entertainment for a period of time. Abstinence may be involuntary, from physical inability to eat or drink for health reasons. In the presence of normal gustatory and digestive capabilities, involuntary fasting could be from inability to procure the necessary food as a result of personal poverty, natural or man-made disasters like famine, floods, earthquakes, wars, and mass migration of people. Voluntary fasting is when one abstains from foods and drinks for reasons other than medical restriction. Fasting can be physical and or mental. Abstinence from nutritional nourishment of the body is physical lasting. When one denies the body of any pleasures, sensuous desires or abstains from acts or thought that give pleasure or satisfaction to the body then one is practicing mental fasting.

Fasting has been practiced by many people and cultures for ages throughout history. Jesus Christ and founders of other great religions and their followers fast and pray during their lives. New Open Bible (1990) North -western American Indians living on the plains fast before and during a

vision quest (Munro 1974). The priests of the South western section of American Indians fast during their "retreats" with prayer (Leonad 1994). In the religions of ancient peoples and civilizations, fasting was a practice to prepare persons especially the priests, in order, to approach the deities (Arthur 1998). In the Hellenistic mystery religions (e.g. the healing cult of the god Asdepius), the deities often revealed their divine teachings in dreams and visions only after a fast that required the total devotion of the devotees. Furthermore, Pre-Columbian peoples of Peru fasted as one of the requirements for penance after the confession of sins before a priest. Fasting for special purposes or before and during special sacred times is also a characteristic of the major religions of the Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity. In addition fasting has also served certain social and political purposes. In-mates of prison cells have been known to fast in order to draw attention to the poor conditions of the prisons; political prisoners have fasted to protest their incarceration. Mahatma Ghandhi in 1924 conducted a fast in prison to atone for the violent excesses of his followers who did not adhere strictly to his teaching of non-violent protest against the rule of laws (Munro 1974). In India, fasting was practiced to protest against-war and social injustice meted on them by the British colonial conquistadors.

Fasting, Bio-Medicine and Ethics; A Conceptual Clarification

According to Allan (1981) fasting is defined as chastening the flesh and uplifting the spirit while Emman (1989) defines fasting as abstaining from food for some hours or days for spiritual purposes. In other words, fasting is a form of asceticism, derived from the Greek noun askesis, meaning exercise or training. Asceticism was initially directed among the ancient Greeks to training for physical fitness in athletes, later asceticism was applied to other ideals, goals like. Thus the ideals of training for a physical goal were converted to that of attaining wisdom or intellectual faculties. More so, asceticism came when the nation of such training was applied to the realm of ethics in the ideal of the sage, who is able to act freely to choose or refuse a desired object or act of physical pleasure. Asceticism which was practiced included avoidance of evil, the suppression of bad tendencies of the moderation of excessive passion and the object of strengthening of the virtues that perfect moral and spiritual life that enable one cultivate inner power (Arthur 1978). The value of ascetic discipline in strengthening man's will and his deeper spiritual powers has been a part of many religions and philosophies.

"Biomedicine" on the other hand is derived from a combination of the prefix "bio" and the term "medicine". In its noun form Bio derive from the Greek word bio which means "life". Medicine is the art and science of the prevention and cure of diseases. Biomedicine perceives health as a physical well-being. It is a freedom from disease stress depression, mental disorder and emotional instability. Biomedicine perceives disease as either an illness or a disorder of either the body or the mind. Each disease has its own cause, but diseases are grouped according to basic causes. Some of the basic causes of various diseases are bacillus fungus, bacterium, virus and protozoa. More so, biomedical science considers food as an important means of prevention and core of diseases. A balanced diet is essential in bio-medical science, some of the food nutrients required in biomedical are carbohydrates, fats, proteins, minerals, vitamins and water.

Phenome-logical of Ethics

Ethics is a study of human conduct or man's conduct. It is made up of all voluntary actions. Those actions which are performed under the normal conditions of man's capacities conduct include inward activities such as intentions, motives and desires. Outward activities include

speech, movement and action. Human conduct deals with relationship between persons and between social groups. It is concerned with the conditions and consequences of people's interactions of society. Thus, a person's conduct affects one or other member of the society. These personal capacities are his private abilities, but what he does with them cannot stay exclusively within his own person, it has very far reaching effects on other people because they involve his external conduct. In the personal conduct, the right, the duties, interests and the conditions of others are directly or indirectly implicated (Hosper 1970).

In other sense, Bio-ethics is an ethical study of the works of the scientists and technologists in the area of biological manipulation of human life. Bio-ethics observes, scrutinizes, evaluates, and investigate the biological goals; methods, instruments, procedure, findings and products of the biological manipulations of human beings with serious consequences for the nature or qualities, purpose and welfare of human kind. The biological manipulations of the human life undermine the sanctity, integrity, worth, dignity, honour, respect, security and well-being of the human person. Bio-ethics seeks to prevent or at least, denounce a situation in which biologists may propound false biological theories that may lead to unjust laws, policies and progratrunes in society. Therefore, bio ethics draws the attention of biologists, technologists and the public to the cultural, social economic and political consequences of the misuse of human genetic research. Bio-ethics arouses the interest, attention and concern of the ethical thinkers, analysts, critics, advocates, challenges and humanitarians who denounce and condemn the devaluation and degrading of the human life (Dzurgba 1998).

Evaluation of Fasting as Exemplified in the Bible

Fasting is an ancient practice that has its origin in the Bible. Patriarchs and prophets fasted and there is evidence of this in the Bible. Through fasting, these great men and women of old achieved a lot and showed that one can perform wonders when fasting is used in combination with prayer and faith. Dakes (1963: 20) says that fast means abstinence from food, that which caused the fall of man. He states that, fasting not only humbles the soul but also manifests earnestness before God to the exclusion of ail else as it chastens the soul, fasting subdue the appetite, gives the digestive system a rest, denies them and thereby demonstrate the mastery of man over appetite, thus man has the entire time for prayer. Fasting develops faith, crucifies unbelief, aids prayer, helps to attain power over demons and aids when in temptation.

In the Old Testament, fasting was a standardized way of expressing devotion and worship. It was an integral part of the people's religion. Individuals and groups of people fasted on corporate challenges. The most important part of prayer is the submission to His Lordship and acknowledging Him. King David humbled himself in supplication for the life of Bathsheba's first son (I Sam. 12:16). The absolute fast is described as abstaining from both food and water. The example is the call by Esther, "Go and assemble all Jews to be food insurant and fast for me. Take neither food nor drink for three days, night and day and I and my maids will fast as you do (Esther 4:13-16)".

We observe that in making this, Esther was soliciting for divine help. The purpose of abstaining from food and drink was to ask for divine help. She invited the Jewish community to join in the spiritual exercise. More so, Ezra proclaimed a fast by the River of Ahava. The purpose of the fast was to "mortify" themselves before God. Mortification is a deliberate attempt to keep the flesh

under subjection, to put it in obedience to the spirit mortification may help the individual to concentrate on his prayers. Moses fasted for forty days and forty nights while he was on the mountain to receive the tablets of stone (Exodus, 24: 13-18). Elijah absolutely fasted for forty days and nights. This was during his plights with Jezebel who wanted to avenge the death of the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal (I Kings 19: 5-8). Daniel fasted for twenty-one days during which he received the vision of the heavenly messenger in the third year of Cyrus, King of Persia (Dan 10:3-13). Fasting was mentioned by Prophet Isaiah and Hosea, He admonished the people of Judah to return to God with all their heart through fasting, weeping and mourning (Joel 12: 12-13).

In the New Testament, Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights. This gave Him victory over the tempter. It was after this period of fasting that Jesus did not only fast, he taught Christians how to fast (math 6:17&18). Paul the greatest missionary was engaged in fasting for three days when he met with God on the way to Damascus (Act 9: 9, 17). He fasted many times to keep the body in subjection so that he would be able to commune with God. Prophetess Anna worshipped God with fasting. Anna at eighty four years of age did not leave the temple, she was worshipping with fasting and prayer day and night (Luke 2:37). Fasting was also a common practice among the early Christian Churches in Antioch and other places (Acts 13: 1-5).

Healing and body fitness

From the medical point of view, fasting promotes the health of the body if judiciously practiced for a short time. It is therefore used as a part of the medical treatment of some diseases. People going for an operation fast for a variable period of time as part of the preparation. In some illnesses, the rest that fasting gives to the bowel is made use of in treatment. Fasting aids in the pruning down of weight when excessive. When the appetite is poor, a period of fasting could generate and stimulate satiety. This has been made use of in ancient times in Rome and is a pastime of gourmets (Canon, 1979).

Spiritual development is perhaps the most common reason why people fast and the measure of success attained by earnest seekers and medical personnel attest to its efficacy. It is responsible for its continued appeal to Christians irrespective of their profession, nationality, creed and colour throughout history. The most stupendous effect of fasting is seen when applied in the spiritual plane. Several people have received answers to their prayers when faith is combined with prayer and spiced with fasting. Spiritual bonding is cement among spouses, family members and church members who fast and pray together. It is not possible to enumerate all the spiritual benefits that can be got through fasting, but it has an effect of toning the body, when properly practiced, that still has no medical explanation.

Through fasting, many Christians have achieved spiritual breakthrough and have been blessed by God with new talents and abilities. Thus after a period of fasting, some people have been able to see visions, to receive messages, and to have prophetic dreams. Those who have had this ability before says that fasting improves the ability and makes further reception easier (Arthur 1978). In other words, fasting makes one to be sharper in spirit. Spiritual healing could be bestowed on believers through fasting. People afflicted with certain diseases that have defied medical science have been healed after a period of fasting and prayer. Some believers have acquired the power of

healing when their supplications were supported by faith and fasting. Often, the gifts are unsolicited or even hidden until they suddenly blossom.

Inherent in anybody who fasts is a feeling of spiritual well-being and an inward satisfaction that he is following the tenets of his religion. Fasting and prayer with faith have turned seemingly hopeless situations into successes. Disasters have been averted and the course of history has been changed through fasting. Christians, individually or as groups that employ prayer, faith and fasting before any endeavor have met with more successes in life. In all, fasting aids spiritual development, spiritual unfolding and creates solutions to human problems, both spiritual and physical, in addition to the purity of mind and body that is attendant to the practice of fasting.

Health, Spirituality and vitality: An Appraisal

In the period of fasting, there is sub-nutrition in the body with reduced or absent food intake (Exton 1971). Adaptive changes are set in motion and these are usually in the form of breakdown of the body tissues to provide necessary energy substrate to maintain normal metabolism, and also to provide energy for the body's physical activities. This breakdown is rapid at first and more marked in muscles. Gradually, with further adaptation to the fast, it is minimal as fat is now being utilized and the body's energy requirements are reduced by other mechanisms. It is possible for some people to fast for long periods without obvious abnormal physical signs. However, under critical examination, it is revealed that the fasting has been accompanied by a loss of weight, change in the texture of the skin which becomes rough, doughy, inelastic and less resistant to infection. Skin rashes are common after prolonged fasting due to a loss of resistance to infection. There is also a reduction in the metabolic rate, and the hair stands on end and is brittle (Cott, 1975).

After a period of fasting, the person is weak, lacks energy, tires easily, and sometime suffers from attacks of dizziness. This results from the very little reserves of energy substrates for activity. As a part of the adaptive processes, the bulk of muscles and glands is reduced to conserve energy for maintenance; the heart is reduced in size and there is bradycardia (reduced heart rate)) and a reduced systolic blood pressure. Thus a person cannot cope with sudden serious physical exertion after prolonged fasting and is one of the major reasons for sudden collapse.

Atrophy of the small intestines which is always present in prolonged fasting is a part of reduction of body glands earlier mentioned and is also as a result of disuse atrophy. This atrophy may be severe enough to prejudice the ability to digest and absorb nutrients, thus indigestion is common in prolonged fasting. Once diarrhea has begun, the loss of fluid in the stool causes great disturbances in water and salt balance. The essence is that diarrhea can be catastrophic in a person who is fasting. The moral is that after prolonged fasting, a return to normal diet should be gradual step in order to allow the intestine to adjust back to normal activity. There is a reduction in the basal metabolism of the tissues with the resultant reduction in body temperature. Fasting people cannot stand exposure to cold and should take measures to protect themselves from excessive cold. A mild anaemia may be present after prolonged fasting, and fasting if prolonged may lead to oedema of the extremities. The picture may be similar to adult kwashiorkor. A fast carried to this stage has gone too far.

Lastly, psychological symptoms may occur in prolonged fasting. This may be the form of restlessness, irritability, indifference to the trouble of others and these may be combined with

physical apathy. At this stage, spiritual revelations proffered by the individual should be received with great caution.

Pre-and Post Medieval Christianity and Fasting As Sacerdotal Practice

The early church fathers fasted, many of them living ascetic lives. They abhorred everything in this material world and withdrew from it in order to serve God like Essenes group of Qumran community in the wilderness of Black sea (Fatokun 2008: 30). Father Jerome, a respected church leader and theologian fasted. He documented his experience with the following statements:-

My face was pale with fasting, but though my limbs were chilled yet my mind was burning with desire, and the fires of lust was kept bubbling before me, when my flesh was as good as dead. Helpless, I cast myself at the feet of Jesus. I watered them with my tears, I wiped them with my hair, and then I subdued my rebellious body with weeks of abstinence (Stevenson 1978).

The great reformers and revivalists of church history fasted. There are records of fasting by Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, John Wesley, David Jonathan Edwards, David Branais Charles Finny and others. They used fasting to subdue the flesh and sharpen their spiritual awareness. Protestant churches have inherited the value that the reformers and great men of faith have placed on fasting. They believed that fasting strengthens ones spiritual life by weakening the attraction of sensual pleasures. The Roman Catholic Church differentiates between fasting and abstinence. Fasting is made obligatory on all members over twenty one years of age, people over fourteen years may join the abstinence. The church mandates the members to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. One could still observe Fridays as the day of abstinence but it is not mandatory, (Adetunji 1998).

The Greek Orthodox Church recognizes two hundred and sixty fasting days in a year. These include every Wednesday and Friday, forty days before Christmas, forty days before Easter, and fifteen days before the feast of assumption. However some Christians fast during the forty days of lent. During this time, they pray to overcome temptation, rededicate themselves to God and meditate in preparation for Easter. The Eastern Orthodox Church permits all food except meat during the first week of lent. The practice in modern day Pentecostal Churches is an inheritance and adaptation of all these practices. Great luminaries in the Western Apostolic movement like Braide, Ayo Joseph Babalola, Moses Orimolade, Oshofa among others employed fasting to sharpen their spiritual awareness and perform excellently in their spiritual assignment.

Human Nutrition, Metabolism and Homeostasis in the Body

The food supplies the raw materials for growth and repair of tissues. The provision of food, water electrolytes, vitamins and oilier nutrients is essential to health. The science of food and feeding is called Nutrition (Cahill 1970). An adequate understanding of the nutritional effects of fasting on the body requires knowledge of the normal requirements of the body for food, water, electrolytes, and micro-nutrients such as trace elements together with some appreciation of the ways in which starvation alters the normal requirements for these nutrients.

The taken of food provides the energy for the body's metabolic activity (Felig 1979). Energy is defined as the capacity to do work, measured in calories. One calories is defined as the amount of heat needed to raise the temperature of 1kilogram (kg) of water by 1 degree Celsius (101). In system international (S.I) unit of food energy is expressed in kilojoules (KJ), one calories being equal to 4.2 kilojoules. (Robinson 1977). Food energy can be likened to the gasoline (petrol) in a vehicle (the human body). The oxidation of food that is taken provides energy in form of calories.

Energy is required for all metabolic processes which include the action of the heart in the circulation of blood; the movement of the diaphragm and other muscles of respiration and other involuntary activities (Munro 1964). It is also required for the maintenance of body temperature; physical activities such as daily work and house hold chores; actions like talking, swallowing, jumping and running. Growth, physical and mental development will be impossible without the synthesis of new and repair of old and worn out tissues (Medical 1971).

In simple words, an adult male of 25 years weighing about 65kg and doing light work for 8 hrs per day needs 3,000 calories a day. A female in similar conditions needs 2,500 calories which puts the average calories requirements of an adult at around 3,000 calories per day. The calories requirements, which declines with age is less in the slim or the sedentary and it is affected by the environmental conditions. Thus, there are variations in the needs of similar people living in the cold and warm climates (Howard, 1974).

Moreover, during the first days of complete fasting, calories needs are supplied by body fats and protein while the small glycogen reserve is largely spared. During this period, 60-90gms of body protein would be broken down daily and 10-15gm of Nitrogen will be excreted daily in the urine. The majority of this protein is largely derived from skeletal muscle and is converted to glucose in the liver by the process of gluconeogenesis. Most of this endogenously produced glucose is used by the brain. This obligatory Nitrogen loss reflects the use of amino-acids derives from muscle protein for gluconeogenesis to supply glucose to the brain.

Taking at least 100gms of glucose per day will obviate most of this gluconeogenesis and reduce the Nitrogen loss by at least half (Exton, 1971). The liver derives its energy by oxidizing fats to ketones and the remainder of the body utilizes both fatty acids and ketones to meet calories requirements. 75gm of proteins would provide 45gm of glucose per day. This excessive use of proteins at the initial stage is partly responsible for the weakness seen in early fasting particularly in muscular young adults. Adults loose weight rapidly at first, but this tends to slow down and becomes stabilized at a lower level. Children cease to grow or may even lose weight. If complete fasting continues for more than a few days, adaptive measures are set in place by the body to conserve body patterns and calories.

Socio-Medio-Ethical Implication of Prolong Fasting

In fasting, one abstains from physical nourishment. This crucifies the appetite, deprives the body of nourishment and gives the digestive system a rest. Through this spiritual exercise man subjugates the hotly in order to free the soul. The point of emphasis in fasting is an advantage of the spirit to the disadvantage of the body. Many people irrespective of age or generation attest to the power of fasting in achieving spiritual, social and political results. Human lives and national

destiny have been changed for the better through fasting. Sometimes, fasting could be achieved without much adverse effects on the body's vitality. While some also been achieved at the expense of the body's vitality. The balance depends on the adaptive homeostatic mechanisms during the process of fasting. If the body could cope irrespective of the length or type of fast, then very little adverse effects would be seen in the body (Salem, 1976). A breakdown or mal-adaptation during the period of sub-nutrition would result in negative effects of fasting in the body.

In other words, fasting is invigorating to the spirit but debilitatory to the body. The soul is made stronger while the body is made weaker and yet the body is where the soul resides. Without the body, the soul cannot exist. The progressive sub-nutrition of the body occasioned by fasting is offset by adaptive mechanisms continue and, if sufficient, would keep the body in good health. However, these homeostatic mechanisms can break down and illness can result from fasting. These adverse effects could occur either as a result of reduced water intake or as a result of starvation which create increased demands for certain nutrients or as side effects of certain nutrients passing down the gastrointestinal tract without the buffering effect of food. Some of these adverse effects may not show in the appearance or may be subtle in their manifestation. The most common ones include low vitality, hypoglycemia, salt depletion, peptic ulceration, peptic ulcer, hemorrhage, dehydration, vitamin deficiencies and sometimes sudden death (Commne, 1997).

Moreover, under critical examination, it is revealed that fasting have been accompanied by a loss of weight, change in the texture of the skin which becomes rough, doughy, inelastic and less resistant to infection. At a part of the adaptive processes, the bulk of muscles and glands are reduced to conserve energy for maintenance, the heart is reduced in size and there is bradycardia (reduced heart rate) and a reduced systolic blood pressure. Thus a person cannot cope with sudden serious physical exertion after prolonged fasting and is one of the major reasons for sudden collapse.

In addition, psychological symptoms may occur in prolonged fasting. This maybe in the form of restlessness, irritability, indifference to the trouble of others and these may be combined with physical apathy (Canon, 1979).

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, fasting is safe, beneficial and of high spiritual value. This based on the fact that if it is properly practiced could achieve tremendous results with little adverse effect on the body. It is hoped that, this write-up will sensitize and create awareness that will help in making fasting safer for the body.

However, from the medio-ethical point of view, fasting could be tolerated by the body if it is practiced for short period and highly nutritious food is taken in between fasting. Those suffering from diarrhea or fever should not fast and those who are diabetic or having renal problems should not fast. Also, able men and women who were previously well but who started becoming dizzy, weak, unsteady and confused should consider the wisdom of disengaging the fast. If one becomes lethargically apathetic or having muscle cramps, such person should consider breaking

the fast. If suddenly one found out that the person cannot swallow his saliva or develops sore throat, it is advisable to break the fast, take water and see the doctor.

Recommendations

- Children should not fast, it is not good for them, if they fast for too long, they may cease to grow according to their age or even lose weight more quickly and more seriously.
- People who are ill and feeble should not be made to fast because they stand the stress poorly.
- Those suffering from ulcer, those who are diabetic should not fast. If they fast, it must be done with caution. They should break the fast at the earliest sign of discomfort.
- The old people should concentrate water very well, like children or adult, they quickly and seriously show effects of water deprivation.

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