

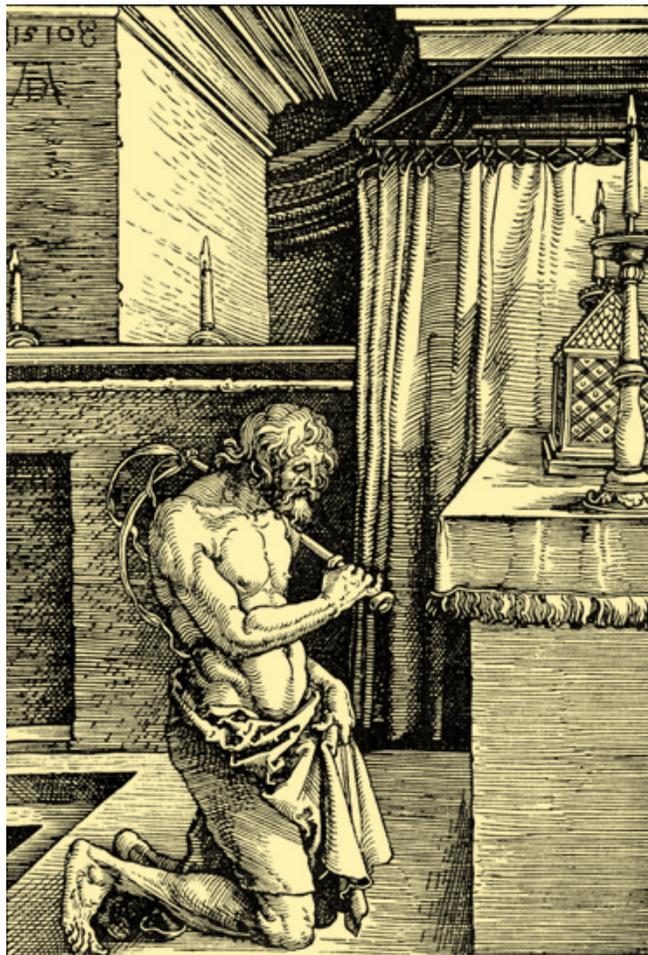
Fasting as a Factor in Soul Growth

NOT INFREQUENTLY questions concerning the benefit or detriment of fasting come before the writer and it may therefore be well to elucidate the origin and rationale of this practice that we may determine what effect, if any, it has upon soul growth.

Under the ancient dispensations it was required that sacrifices of bulls and goats should be made as atonement for sin, for man then treasured his material possessions even higher than today, and felt keenly their loss when forced to give them up for such a purpose. Even in modern days indulgences are bought and forgiveness of sins promised anyone donating a sum of money to the Catholic Church for purchasing candles and similar paraphernalia required in the service.

But there has always been an esoteric teaching, which is being promulgated exoterically today and this teaching does not accept the sacrifice of an animal, money or other possessions, but demands that each one makes a sacrifice of himself. This was taught to the aspirants in the ancient Mystery School when they were prepared for the mystic rite of initiation. To them were explained the mysteries of the vital body, how it is composed of four ethers:

- 1) The Chemical Ether, which is necessary to assimilation.
- 2) The Life Ether, which furthers growth and propagation.
- 3) The Light Ether, which is the vehicle of sense perception.
- 4) The Reflecting Ether, which is the storehouse of memory.



Woodcut, 1510, Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)

The Penitent

Severe fasting, a form of internal scourging, is both detrimental to physical health and counterproductive to soul growth.

He was thoroughly instructed in the functions of the two lower ethers as compared with the two higher. He knew that all the purely animal functions of the body depended upon the density of the lower ethers, and that the two upper ethers composed the soul body, which was the vehicle of service, and he aspired, naturally, to cultivate this glorious garment by self-abnegation and by curbing the propensities of the lower nature, just as we do today.

These facts were kept secret from the masses, or rather they should have been, but some neophytes who were overzealous to attain, no matter how,

forgot that it is only by service and unselfishness that the golden wedding garment composed of the two higher ethers is grown. They thought that the occult maxim

Gold in the Crucible,
Wrought in the fire
Light as the winds,
Higher and higher

meant only that so long as the lower nature, the dross, was expelled, it did not matter how, and if they could find an easy method, they would have left only the gold composed of the two higher ethers, the soul-body, in which they could then enter the invisible world without let or hindrance. They reasoned that as the chemical ether is the agent of assimilation, it could be eliminated from the vital body by starving the physical vehicle. They also thought that as the life ether is the avenue of propagation, they could starve it out by living celibate lives.

By following that method, so they reasoned, they would retain only the two higher ethers, and therefore they practiced all the austerities they could think of, fasting among others. By this process the dense body lost its health and became emaciated. The passional nature, which sought gratification by the exercise of propagative function, was stilled by castigations. It is true that in this horrible manner the lower nature seemed to be subjected, and it is also true that when the bodily functions were thus brought to a very low ebbs, or rather hallucinations, were often the reward of these misguided people. Others who heard of their supposed sanctity were eager to imitate them. Thus their example has diverted thousands of seeking souls from the true Way.

But the result obtained by these misguided people and their followers is far from being what was

intended by the training in the Mystery school. The candidate was there taught first and foremost, that the body is the temple of God, and that to defile, destroy, or mutilate it in any manner is a great sin. Indulgence of the appetite is a sin, a defiling practice which brings with it certain retribution, but it is no more to be reprehended than the practice of fasting for soul growth.

Right living is neither feasting or fasting, but giving the body those elements which are necessary to maintain it in the proper form of health, strength, and efficiency as an instrument of the spirit.

Therefore fasting for soul growth is a pseudo-method which has exactly the opposite effect of that which it was designed to accomplish by its short-sighted originators.

“I am the door,” said the Christ, “if any man enter not by the door, the same is a thief and a robber.” Similarly with the practice of celibacy for the sake of soul

growth, the maxim enunciated at the beginning of this paragraph applies equally well. It is reprehensible when men and women made in the image of God degrade themselves by indulgence of the passional nature to a status lower than that of beasts, but it is equally reprehensible when those who live otherwise good and holy lives refuse to sacrifice their aspirations to give a waiting soul the body and environment it needs, that they may have all their time for self-development. They may by fasting attenuate the chemical ether, and by their fanatical selfish celibate lives they may also eliminate the life ether to a great extent, but these measures will never build the golden wedding garment which is the ‘open sesame’ to the mystic marriage feast, for want of which some who have succeed in surreptitiously entering, by just such illegitimate methods as fasting, castigation and celibacy will be thrown out into outer darkness. □

—Max Heindel

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