

"The screen was repainted on the day of the dramatization by the men who took part in the act. No actor tasted food on that day before the decoration of the screen was finished, and at the close of their work all vomited over the cliff."

-HOPI KATCINAS
(Fewkes 1985:42)

28. FAST, FASTER, FASTING

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INTRODUCTION:

Within this model, there must be some explanation for the effect of fasting.^{1} Fasting was practiced in OT time, so it is not unique to NT doctrine. The generalized version of the commandment as it stands today in SMD, i.e. the version that involves the entire congregation, is to refrain from eating -and drinking?^{2}- two meals -or 24 hours, depending on one's persuasion- on the first Sunday of each month. Then a cash donation^{3} of a commensurate amount is made to the congregation.^{4} This donation is then used by the bishop of that congregation to alleviate need within his group.^{5}

In addition to this ecclesiastical requirement that the entire congregation participate in a fast on the first day of each month, there also exists the option for individuals to fast privately, or as a family, or in groups of friends, etc. The timing of these private fasts is determined by the needs and interests of those individuals. When sickness or needs or worries exist that seem to require external support and assurance, these fasts can be arranged privately by anyone in any combination. No ecclesiastical

¹ The companion chapter to this one is 34. PRAYER, fasting and prayer generally being linked.

² The issue of drinking seems to allow drinking of water, at least in the mind of some, but no purist will agree that drinking anything else is acceptable because it constitutes intake of nutrients.

It should also be noted that persons with health problems, or those who must take medications with meals, or pregnant or nursing women are excepted from this requirement.

And finally, it is noted that there is no note taken by anyone about how many of the congregation do or don't fast. The closest measure taken is to simply count the amount of money collected today for the aggregate congregation. But that value isn't used to evaluate the quality of the congregation.

It is interesting to note that while the candid assessment of worthiness undergone when seeking permission to go into an LDS temple, that payment of this fast offering is not evaluated specifically. Reference is made in a general way, but it is not as rigid and inflexible as the rule governing the payment of the 10% tithing. Why?

³ In early LDS history, and even into the 20th century, contributions "in kind" were offered, eg. pigs, chickens, wheat, milk, cheese, carrots, etc. This was necessary given the scarcity of specie to trade around, but it certainly presented a challenge to the one responsible for assuring that it didn't spoil before it was distributed. There was a "Bishop's Storehouse" specifically designed to house and sort these items.

⁴ Note how much more rigorous the Hopi are about this fasting business, as described in the chapter quote. Not only must one abstain from food, but he must also forcibly empty his stomach at the end of the fast, a procedure that is doubtless painful in the absence of food. And note that the latter is done en masse. This is a different mandatory communal activity than the monthly testimony meeting of the LDS faith, though it is still a communal ritual.

⁵ The major focus of the use of these 'fast-offerings' is to assist families and individuals, within that specific congregation, who need assistance. However, it is significant that there is also a tangential benefit that, in its own way, is equally meaningful. This benefit derives from the fact that young men of the congregation, aged at least 12 and empowered with the Aaronic priesthood, are the ones who "gather the fast offerings." This places them in selfless activities of service to the community. This note is, of course, an extension of a previous note that included a brief anthropological analysis of the role of biennial age-mate groupings of young men and women in each congregation.

In addition to the young men giving of themselves, they also learn some painful lessons. When they are sent to the home of a person who is angry at the church, who refuses to contribute, the commentary is occasionally of a fairly scathing variety that embarrasses the young men. That, however, can be viewed as simply preparation for the future missionary work these young men are exhorted to perform, during which they will be overwhelmingly rejected.

authorization is required for these fasts.^{6}

The central questions, then within the context of this mechanical model, are:

- 1) What is the impact of a fast on an individual?
- 2) Is the impact of these two types of fasts the same?
- 3) Is there any impact on the congregation of a communal fast?

INDIVIDUAL IMPACT:

To address these answers, especially within the context of the metatheory, let's consider what the process is that an individual goes through when fasting. Then we can make some observations and perhaps draw some conclusions.

To fast, an individual must identify the day that the fast will be done. The first Sunday communal one is cast in stone, but the private ones are variable as far as dates, and as far as their length. S/he selects which meal/s will be included or excluded as part of the fast. These decisions obviously require that the person exercise some control over him/herself. Exercise of agency is one of the keys, then.

Then on the selected day, for the selected meals, s/he does not eat. The fast may be initiated and terminated with special personalized prayers that address the needs being addressed. S/He will otherwise live in his/her world as usual, and co-workers, friends or strangers will not be aware of the process. The difference, however, may be profound. "Inside"^{7} of him/herself, s/he knows that s/he is doing something that is unusual, something that is not visible to those in the environment. During this time period, s/he will be aware of food and drink, and will even feel a need for them, but will not satisfy that need until the agreed-upon time for breaking the fast has arrived. Then after s/he has completed his/her fast, a prayer is usually offered prior to breaking the fast.

If the fast is the mandatory monthly one, s/he will donate some cash to be used in the congregation. Personal fasts are not "paid for" with a contribution to the bishop, which is a curious difference between the two, though there is probably no doctrinal basis, rather a purely pragmatic one, i.e. a means to generate new

⁶ And curiously enough, there is no liturgical requirement that commensurate contributions be given to the congregation. Why? The purist would probably insist that such contribution might even enhance the efficacy of the fast. But we don't know. We just note the difference.

⁷ This term is from the LDS argot that seems to be understood by everyone, but which is also undefinable by most everyone. We will explain that we believe the term refers to the spirit itself, not to anything in the mortal brain, though the functioning of the mortal brain and its peripherals will have some indirect effect on the spirit.

funds^{8}.

{STOPPED REVISION HERE - REWORK}

That is the process that one goes through to fast, but there are two important details to add about the mental and emotional dimensions of the fast. One involves prayer and the other, purpose. In the case of the latter, an individual may select a particular purpose for the fast. Indeed, experts in the Faith suggest that fasting without a purpose will have minimal effect. For example, he may choose to use that fast as a means to assist himself in obtaining inspiration he feels he needs about some problem(s) in his life, he may seek peace, etc. And in regards to the former, he may begin his fast with prayer, he may pray during the fast, and may end it with prayer.

The value of a purpose is probably obvious. The person is then more focussed in what he does during the day. His thoughts will hold that purpose in mind, and he may find that the fast is easier than he had anticipated because of this purpose.

And the value of prayer is equally obvious. The person who fasts and who takes advantage of that time to speak to his Creator about needs he has, is in an unusual state of mind. All people who pray with some feelings of sincerity and willingness to do this, will all testify that there is something remarkable about such an experience. He may feel basically the same as on other days, but there is something particularly important about the feelings of that day.

IS EFFECT OF BOTH FASTS THE SAME:

The answer to this question can only be given by dividing it into two parts. One must refer to the effect on individuals and must also refer to the effect on a congregation.

In regards to individuals, the effects of fasting are probably fairly uniform. They will all benefit from the experience, even though some request of the person may not be granted. This individual effect has no reference to another person or group. It is personal and private.

Within this model, there is a specific suggestion to make regarding this effect on the individual. In **28. HOLY GHOST** and in **33. PRAYER** it is noted that there is apparently a way to cause some sort of effect on the brain-brain interface. This effect results in something peculiar for the individual undergoing it, and there are two general possibilities that explain it. The effect is simply that the individual is capable of receiving inspiration. This inspiration may be a sense of comfort and peace, or it may be

⁸ This leads one to ask just why it is that there is such a stringent rule today that tithes must be given directly to one of the bishopric of the ward. One suspects that this rule is necessitated by the problems associated with looser controls. It doesn't seem likely to us, that there is a true doctrinal stricture against giving tithes to clerks, etc.

the transmittal of specific knowledge or information.^{9}

And the manner in which a person becomes susceptible to inspiration is first, through some sort of personal preparedness, and second, through a process that opens a channel between the two brains. Through this channel, the spirit brain will be able to pass back the information needed. If the source of the information is the holy ghost, then he will be able to impinge on the mortal brain and thereby transmit the information of feelings needed.

But in a congregation, when there is a united fasting on the assigned day, or for an assigned purpose, something occurs that is additional to the effect on individuals. The community of fasting may experience a synergism that derives from the multiplied effect of many individuals once fasting and praying at once. Note that this multiplication effect may be geometrically multiplied, rather than arithmetically. The effect is greater than what would be expected from just adding together the individual benefits. Then, this combined effect, may in fact cause things in the congregation to somehow be effected.

There is the obvious psychological benefit of having a group of people cooperate in an enterprise. And this benefit is heightened by the fact that they are selflessly involving themselves in the exercise. But in addition to the psychological benefits, I believe that there are also potential religious benefits.

CONCLUSION:

There are real benefits to an individual who participates willingly in a fast, whether it is a private one, or a general congregational one. And there are benefits to the congregation of such a fast, benefits that probably outweigh the simple sum of the individual effects

⁹ See Footnote 10 of 28. HOLY GHOST for details of this process.