

A GUIDE TO POLITICAL FASTING

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This is a revision of the Guide to Fasting published in 1980 by the Nonviolent Tactics Development Project. Included are more examples of political fasts and a section on how to organize a political fast, as well as increased documentation and a bibliography.

We are interested in the widest possible dissemination of this information. Readers are welcome to copy parts of this Guide. Copies may be ordered from us @ \$2 each.

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Preface

Throughout recorded history, people have fasted. Whether done for religious, political or health reasons, the fast has represented an attempt to radically exorcise a deeply rooted evil. People have fasted to appease an angry god, protest intolerable conditions and cleanse the body of illness. Though fasting is an individual act, when done in community with others, it can bind people together.

As increasing amounts of the earth's resources are diverted from meeting human needs into building the nuclear arsenal, we are brought daily closer to the brink of nuclear war. The First Step Campaign is an effort, through the nonviolent and dramatic tactic of fasting, to effectively challenge the present course of events and bring about a halt to the nuclear arms race. The Campaign calls for the organization of a three year international effort to bring about a freeze on the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons by the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R.. The Campaign will culminate, if necessary, in an international Fast for Life in 1983.

When used in connection with the campaign to stop the nuclear arms race, the fast seeks a powerful and direct means to unite people in community to assume control over their lives. It signifies a commitment toward overcoming those obstacles erected in our name and with our tax dollars which now deprive people throughout the world of the ability to provide for themselves. Through the medium of a shared hunger, the fasters express solidarity with the victims of the silent holocaust of world starvation, and protest the convoluted priorities of an industrial world that squanders its resources on weapons. More than 800 million people daily suffer the effects of malnutrition.

The First Step Campaign is part of a major peace movement employing all of the other non-violent measures of resistance and change, such as petition, demonstration and civil disobedience. Because the First Step Campaign is encouraging the development of political fasting and many people are unfamiliar with this nonviolent method, and literature on the subject is scarce, we of the Nonviolent Tactics Development Project have prepared this Guide.

We wish to acknowledge the assistance of the following persons who kindly volunteered their time and talent in the preparation of this Guide:

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Karen Irmsher	Rianne Owen	Alan Siporan	

Our research on political fasting has just begun. We invite our readers to share any information they may have including personal experiences, examples, and reflexions, as well as criticisms of this Guide.

Dedication

This Guide is dedicated to Nellie Paniagua, Angelicia Flores, Aurora Lora and Luzmila Pimentel of Bolivia, leaders of a political fast in 1978 which resulted in amnesty for 19,000 political prisoners, exiles and refugees. Their courage and self-sacrifice is a great inspiration for all who seek an end to injustice.

1. Report: Presidential Commission on World Hunger, Washington D.C., 20402, U.S. Government Printing Office, June, 1980.

Introduction

This Guide is intended to assist persons who are considering fasting as a political action. The material has been drawn from the experience of individuals and groups who have fasted to attain political goals, from natural healing practitioners who employ fasting to maintain health and treat illness, and from medical research. The Guide consolidates existing information on fasting from wide and varied sources.

The Guide includes examples of political fasts, information on physical and emotional effects of fasting, how to prepare for, participate in, and end a fast, and some suggestions on organizing a fast in one's own community.

Though there are different kinds of fasts and limited diets, this guide will treat only the fast where there is abstinence from all food and only water is taken.

Political fasting has been used effectively in social change movements throughout history. Gandhi considered fasting the highest form of satyagraha (truth force) and its most powerful tool.

Political fasts have a high dramatic potential similar to civil disobedience, but without some of the handicaps of civil disobedience, such as diversion of energy into the criminal legal system, public ambivalence about violating laws, and the difficulty of sustaining civil disobedient action for effective periods of time against police power.

It is a commonly held misconception that the body requires two to three meals a day in order to maintain itself. Food is stored in the body's tissues for future use. Most people have a considerable amount of this excess tissue in the form of fat. In fasting, this excess tissue is used to fuel the body and only after it has been used does starvation begin. The fasting period may extend from a few weeks to months before a dangerous physiological condition is reached.

Political fasting requires readiness of spirit, mind and body and should be entered into only after careful preparation of the faster and of her/his support community.

1. Macfadden, Bernar, Fasting for Health. New York, Arco, 1978.

PART ONE

Brief History of Political Fasting

Political fasting has been used by the well known and by the unknown, by persons of many nations, cultures, and religions, by single individuals and by small and large groups for both short and extended periods of time. Fasting has been used with limited and also life-demanding levels of commitment, with no political consequences and with revolutionary consequences. The table on the following page illustrates this variety.

Early in American history a day of fasting and prayer was declared by the Legislative Assembly of the Colony of Virginia as an expression of solidarity with the people of Massachusetts after the British closed Boston Harbor.¹ The fast was widely observed throughout the colony and played a significant role in raising consciousness and mobilizing resistance to British rule. This is an example of the success of a fast in which masses were involved for a very brief period.

Hunger strikes were important in both the English and American Women's Suffrage Movements.² In the American case a hunger strike climaxed the campaign that won the vote for women. Alice Paul, Lucy Burns and other suffragettes were jailed in 1917 for picketing the White House, insisting that President Wilson make good his election promise to support a Women's Suffrage Amendment. The women refused to do prison work and demanded to be treated as political prisoners. When this was refused, the women began a hunger strike. The strike won the attention of the public and much of the public was outraged as reports of forced feeding reached the press. Wilson faced a dilemma. Forced feeding was costing public support. Women dying on his hands would cost more. Granting political status would open the doors to war resisters wanting similar status. He solved his dilemma by offering the hunger strikers their primary goal of his support for the Suffrage Amendment. Wilson pushed the 19th Amendment through Congress early in 1918 and its ratification was completed in 1920.

Hunger strikes by prisoners demanding improved conditions, political prisoner status, or release are probably the most common type of political fast. The above is just one example of many that could be cited. They have been especially common in the U. S., Russia, England and Ireland. In many, the strikers' goals were won, or partially won, without loss of life.⁶⁸ In one case, however, the Vorkuta Labor Camp in the Soviet Union in 1936, a hunger strike of 400 prisoners resulted in the starvation of 40 and the later repression and mass execution of hunger strikers and other prisoners.⁶⁹

In 1963, Barbara Deming and a small interracial group of pacifists were arrested and jailed for leafletting in Albany, Georgia.⁷⁰ They were on a peace march from Quebec to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. They demanded release from jail and freedom to exercise their constitutional right to leaflet. When these demands were denied, they started a hunger strike. The prospects for success did not seem bright. Albany's segregationist power elite prided itself on having successfully resisted massive demonstrations led by Martin Luther King. However, the hunger strike was a different matter. After refusing food for 24 days, the strikers were released. When they resumed leafletting, they were again arrested and began a second hunger strike which went for another 21 days. The city finally offered a compromise permitting limited leafletting and the compromise was accepted by the strikers.

In recent history, Gandhi employed fasting in his struggles against British rule, the caste system, and communal violence. He often fasted alone and did not encourage supporters to join him. He held very high standards and drew sharp distinctions between his ideal of the Satyagraha Fast and the more common hunger strike. He considered the Satyagraha Fast to be the most powerful weapon available to the Satyagrahi. In his view such a fast required great purity, non-possession, and non-attachment to results on the part of the faster. The ideal fast was not coercive, but was a prayer that the parties would seek truth and adhere to truth even if it required the death of the faster. The fast was staking one's life on one's truth.⁷¹ Gandhi's critics held that though this was Gandhi's ideal, in practice his opponents often were not persuaded of his truth and gave in to him because of his immense prestige and for fear of the potential consequences should he die.⁷²

A PARTIAL LIST OF POLITICAL FASTS

Date	Fasters	Place	Issue	Number Fasting	Length/Commitment	Political Consequences (C.R.=Consciousness Raising)	See Note
1774	Most citizens	Virginia, U.S.	Public lethargy about closing Boston Harbour	1000s	1 day	House of Burgesses dissolved. Congress for all colonies called. Resistance to British grew	3
1774	Citizens	Rhode Island	Repression by British	Many	1 day	C. R.	4
1775	Most citizens	Massachusetts	Repression by British	Many	1 day	C. R.	5
18 ?	Female and male prisoners	Russia	Prison conditions (many fasts)	Small & large	Up to death	Mixed; usually improved conditions	6
1878	6 Prisoners	Karkov Prison Russia	Prison conditions	6	Long/ to death; several died	Limited exercise rights granted	7
1879	Prisoners	St. Petersburg Russia	Visiting rights	Several	5-6 days	Fortnightly visits granted	8
1898	Trotsky & others	Kherson Prison Russia	Repression of revolutionary activity by juveniles	Many			9
1909	Women prisoners	Britain	Womens' suffrage; political status for prisoners	100s	Up to month or more	Part of campaign that won the vote for women	10
1915	IWW	Sioux City, Iowa U.S.A.	Free speech & political status	75	86 hours	Release from jail & new cloths for those beaten	11
1917	Women prisoners	Washington D.C.	Womens' suffrage; political status	97	Up to month or more	Pres. Wilson released women. Pushed suffrage amendment through congress	12
1917	Thomas Ashe, Austin Stack	Mountjoy Jail Ireland	Political status	2	1 week/ to death 1 died	C. R.	13
19 ?	Irish Nationalists	Ireland	Irish Freedom	9	94 days		14
1918	Gandhi	Ahmedabad, India	To strengthen resolve of strikers	1	4 days	Workers resolve strengthened. Management settled	15

A PARTIAL LIST OF POLITICAL FASTS (continued)

Date	Fasters	Place	Issue	Number Fasting	Length/Commitment	Political Consequences (C.R.=Consciousness Raising)	See Note
1919	Gandhi	India	a. Preparation for action against repressive legislation b. Penitence for movement violence	All participants 1	1 day 3 days	C.R.	16
1919 1920	Political Prisoners	Butyrki Prison, Moscow	Prison conditions			Improved conditions	17
1920	Irish Nationalists	Mountjoy Jail, Ireland	Political status or freedom from jail	about 100	10 days/ to death	Release from jail & policy changes	18
1920	McSweeney	Ireland	Irish Freedom	1	74 days/ died	C.R.	19
1922	Mensheviks	Russia	Threat of exile for 2000 Mensheviks			12 allowed to leave Russia	20
1932	Gandhi	India	Opposition to communal voting scheme for untouchables	1	5 days/ to death	Compromise settlement	21
1936	Trotskyist labor camp prisoners	Vorkuta labor camp - Russia	Prison conditions and political system	400	1-2 months 40 deaths	Repression & mass executions	22
1943	Gandhi	India	Suppression of congress	1	21 days	None except C.R.	23
1948	Gandhi	India	Communal violence	1	5 days/ to death	Temporary peace in Delhi	24
1952	Dolci	Sicily	Starvation and poverty	1	8 days/ to death	Relief aid sent	25
195?	Peacemakers	Washington D.C., U.S.A.	Opposing construction of H-bomb	50	7 days	C.R.	26
1956	Dolci	Sicily	To get dam built	1, then 1000	7 days 1 day	C.R.	27
1957	Dolci & Alasia	Sicily	Slum clearance	2	14 days	\$84 million for slum clearance	28
1957	Community of The Ark	France	Protest against torture in Algerian War	3, 100s in support fast	20 days	C.R. Many visitors and letters	29

A PARTIAL LIST OF POLITICAL FASTS (continued)

Date	Fasters	Place	Issue	Number Fasting	Length/Commitment	Political Consequences (C.R.=Consciousness Raising)	See Note
1950s	Catholic Workers	U.S.	Hiroshima Day protests of nuclear weapons				30
1950s	Alfred Nahon	Switzerland	Protesting nuclear weapons	1	1-19 days		31
1958	Community of The Ark	France & Switzerland	The Bomb	18 + Support	14 days	Great Power promise of 1 yr. moratorium on testing	32
1960	Community of The Ark	Paris	Internment camps	19	7 days	C.R.	33
1961	Dolci	Sicily	Mafia dam obstruction	1	9 days	Government built dam	34
1962	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament	England	Nuclear disarm. & famine relief	Many		C.R.	35
1962	French	France	Peace in Algeria	Many		C.R.	36
1962	Louis Lecoin	France	Legal recognition of Conscientious objectors	1		C.R.	37
1960s	Buddhists	South Vietnam	Peace & governmental reform	1000s		C.R.	38
1963	Barbara Deming & Peacemarchers	Albany, Geo., U.S.A.	Free speech & segregation	9	25 days + 21 days	Release & compromise on leafletting	39
1963	del Vasto	Rome	Letter to Pope John XXIII Danger of nuclear war	1	40 days	Influence on encyclical Pacem en Terris	40
1965	Dorothy Day + 19 others	Rome	Peace language in Vatican II	20	10 days	Influence on Vatican Council II	41
1966	Lee Stern	U.S.	Vietnam War	1	85 days		42
1966	Dolci	Sicily	Exposing Mafia	1	7 days	C.R.	43
1966	Thich Tri Quang	South Vietnam	Reform	1	100 days	C.R.	44
1968	Cesar Chavez	California, U.S.	Violence among farm workers	1	25 days	C.R., Thousands of visitors; reduced violence	45
1972	Dellinger, Sta-ley-Mays and others	U.S.	Peace movement complacency	about 20	Some for 39 days	C.R., release of U.S. P.O.Ws by North Vietnam	46

A PARTIAL LIST OF POLITICAL FASTS (continued)

Date	Fasters	Place	Issue	Number Fasting	Length/Commitment	Political Consequences (C.R.=Consciousness Raising)	See Note
1972	Pacific Life Community	British Columbia	Resolution against Trident		30 day	Won majority of B.C. legislators	47
1976	Douglass & International	Washington D.C. and elsewhere	To get <u>no first use</u> pledge from Carter & Ford	100	30 day	C.R.	48
1977-1978	Wives of exiles	Bolivia	Amnesty & freedom to organize	1380	22 days	Won amnesty for 19,000 and all other demands	49
1977-1979	Wives of Disappeared	Chile & world-wide	Disappeared persons (3 fasts)	26 to 350	9-16 days 1 died	Government concessions but later retrenchment	50
1977	Solange Fernex	France	Opposing nuclear plant	1	23 days	C.R.	51
1980- June	Rick Hoyer	U. of Minn	Nestle Boycott	1	36 days	Hearing by Regents, C.R.	52
1980- July	West Bank Palestinians	Nafha Prison, West Bank	Prison conditions & status	20% of Palestinian prisoners	33 days 2 died	Hearing with Head of Prisons	53
1980- Aug.	Peace Folk in 10 cities	Western, U.S.	Nuclear arms and hunger	About 150	1-7 days	C.R. local media	54
1980	Solange Fernex	France	TV access-discrimination against Ecology Party	1	9 days	Gained right to speak on all TV channels	55
1980	Iranian Students	Texas	Imprisonment	3 or 4		National media	56
1980	Dick Gregory	Teheran	Hostages (in Iran)	1		International media	57
1980	Gwynfor Evans	Wales	Welsh language on TV	1	To the death	C.R. Movement media	58
1980	Japanese Women	Tokyo	Unemployment	6	3 days	C.R. International media	59
1980- Dec.	IRA Prisoners	Belfast	Political status	7	50+ days	C.R. Extensive international media	60
1980- Dec.	Mich Snyder	Washington, D.C.	Homelessness	1	Month or more	C.R., National media	61
1981- April	Sigord Debus	W. Germany	Political status	25	61 days/ 1 died	C.R., International media	62

A PARTIAL LIST OF POLITICAL FASTS (continued)

Date	Fasters	Place	Issue	Number Fasting	Length/Commitment	Political Consequences (C.R.=Consciousness Raising)	See Note
1981- May	IRA	Belfast	Political status	8 and more pledged	To death 4 died by 6/1/81	C.R. Worldwide media Support demonstrations	63
1981- May	Univ. students & Bomb victims	Japan	U.S. nuclear weapons in Japanese ports	30+	48 hours	Part of protests that have embarrassed government	64
1981- May	Vietnam Vets	Los Angeles	Veterans care and Agent Orange	21	To death	Letter from President; House of Representatives passes law giving priority to treatment of Agent Orange claims	65
1981- June	Polish workers	Poland	To free 7 political pri- soners	17		1 prisoner released as of 6/1/81	66
1981- Aug.	Peace Groups	U.S. & Europe	Nuclear weapons freeze		4 days		67

Most other leading apostles of nonviolence have also used fasting in their struggles for social change. Over the past 30 years Danilo Dolci has fasted alone and with groups as large as a thousand to protest poverty in Western Sicily, to win major slum clearance programs, to gain the construction of a major irrigation dam, to break the Mafia's monopoly over water, and to empower Sicilians in their struggle against Mafia control and corruption.⁷³ His fasts have been remarkably successful.

Cesar Chavez, as Gandhi before him, engaged in a personal fast out of concern for the breakdown of nonviolence.⁷⁴ The farmworkers, frustrated by the length of the grape strike, the lack of progress, and the violence of the growers, were considering the use of violence themselves. Chavez felt that though violent resistance might make gains in the short run, it would defeat their long-term goals. Chavez began an unlimited fast. He was criticized for taking such action as an individual, but he persisted. Thousands of supporters visited him during the fast. Violence decreased sufficiently so that in 25 days he ended his fast.

Lanza del Vasto fasted for 40 days in 1963 after having written Pope John XXIII of his hope and prayer that the Pope⁷⁵ would issue a strong condemnation of preparations for the impending nuclear holocaust. Del Vasto did not announce his action to the media, but relied on his private letter to the Pope. Shortly thereafter *Pacem en Terris* was published. It included a strong denunciation of nuclear war.

During the same period Dorothy Day (Founder of the Catholic Worker Movement and prominent pacifist) and an international group of women engaged in a ten-day fast in Rome during Vatican Council II, successfully gaining⁷⁶ inclusion of some of their desired pro-peace messages in the documents of the Council.

Jim Douglass and members of the Pacific and Atlantic Life Communities engaged in a 30-day private fast in 1974 directed to the British Columbia⁷⁷ Legislature and won over many of its members to opposition to the Trident Weapons system. In 1976 another 30-day fast was used in an effort to gain pledges of no first use of nuclear weapons from the U.S. presidential candidates.⁷⁸ Such pledges were not forthcoming, but a strong resistance community was developed during this fast.

In 1972, Dave Dellinger, Robert Staley-Mays and a number of other anti-Vietnam War activists engaged in a long fast⁷⁹ to deepen the commitment to action of a peace movement that they felt had become complacent. Some fasted as long as 39 days. This fast had an unexpected consequence. On the 17th day of the fast, Dave Dellinger received word from Hanoi that if he would end his hunger strike, the North Vietnamese would release American Prisoners of War into his custody. The media gave major coverage to Dellinger's subsequent flight to Hanoi to receive the P.O.W.'s, but largely ignored the fast that preceded and possibly produced this gesture of goodwill to the American peace movement.

Over the past several years, hunger strikes have been used repeatedly in Chile in the struggle over "Los Desaparecidos," the Disappeared Persons.⁸⁰ The strikes, with support fasts held in many parts of the world, have generally been of short duration and each time have won some concessions from the government. Unfortunately, thus far, the Pinochet regime has reneged on the promises made.

Perhaps the most remarkable hunger strike of recent years occurred in Bolivia in 1978 where a small group of women organized a hunger strike in response to the firing and exile of their spouses or male relatives for labor organizing.⁸¹ To quote Wilson Boots, an international observer of the hunger strike, "In the Bolivian context what the women demanded went beyond reason. They asked an immediate, unrestricted amnesty for political exiles and refugees, restoration of jobs for workers fired for organizing, reinstatement of labor unions and removal of the army from the mines. A remarkable set of aspirations for such a group. But less than a month after they announced the goals, the movement they launched had forced the military dictatorship of General Hugo Banzer to grant the substance of all their demands.

The struggle gained important support from Roman Catholic Archbishop Jorge Marique and the participation of 1,380 persons at the height of the struggle. In the final hours, with the women who started the fast in serious condition, two powerful acts broke the resistance of the government. Archbishop Marique announced that if the government didn't grant the demands within 24 hours, he would close the Cathedral of La Paz except for services for the

seriously ill and dying. At the same time the four women leaders announced they would henceforth not even take water until agreement was reached. Within a day the government conceded. Nineteen thousand political prisoners and exiles were affected by the amnesty. A short time later the dictatorship itself fell and the succeeding government began reforms leading to elections in 1980. The democratic potential, however, was thwarted by the 1980 coup and the subsequent repressive regime. Details of this remarkable hunger strike appear in an article in the May 1, 1978 issue of Christianity and Crisis.

In 1980 and 1981 a number of political fasts have occurred that have received mention in national and international media. That of the I.R.A. prisoners demanding political status received the most attention. As this guide is being written (May 1981) it is still in progress. Four fasters have died. Other prisoners have pledged to continue the hunger strikes until British policy changes. The strike has been a front page story on many days since about two weeks before Bobby Sand's death. Public awareness of the conflict has certainly increased as has support for the IRA. Many prominent persons, including an emissary from the Pope, have been involved.

Such prison hunger strikes often put the government in a dilemma of either granting the demands or creating martyrs for the strikers' cause. In this case, the movement seems to gain no matter what the British do. This fits George Lakey's concept of a good action as one which puts the opponent in a dilemma: no matter what the opponent does, the movement is helped.⁸² The British have thus far chosen to give the IRA new martyrs. Considering the importance of martyrs in social movements generally, and in Irish history particularly, that may be a costly choice.

In Israel, West Bank Palestinians at Nafha⁸³ prison fasted 33 days asking for better conditions and to be moved closer to their families. Women relatives organized support fasts outside the prison. The fast raised consciousness in Israel and abroad concerning the conditions of political prisoners in Israel. Public protest increased when two prisoners died from what was reported to be forced feeding. The fast ended in a compromise settlement involving a meeting between elected representatives of the prisoners and the head of the Israeli Prison Service. A remarkable element of this hunger strike was the ability of the prisoners to organize within the restrictive atmosphere of the prison - (resistance was better organized within the prison than outside of it) - to develop complicated negotiating positions and vote on them, etc., communicating by shouting from cell to cell and cell block to cell block. The final debate by this process lasted 20 hours by persons who hadn't eaten for over 30 days.

These examples give some idea of the variety of uses to which political fasting has been put and the power and drama of this form of nonviolence.

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PART TWO

The Art of Fasting

Each of us is an expert in the ritual called eating. We know when we are hungry, we know how to procure and prepare food, we are intimately familiar with the feeling food gives us when we eat, whether it is satisfaction, indigestion, or both.

Not eating, on the other hand, is largely unknown and unfamiliar. What happens, for example, when we cease to provide our body with solid food? What happens to our appetite, our mind, our vitality, our ability to perform our normal daily activities? And what happens when, after not eating for a period of time, we once again introduce food into our body? It is our hope that by providing insight into these and other important questions we can all become more familiar with the important and relatively unknown art of not eating, or fasting.

Fasting, if done with adequate preparation, and maintained and broken carefully, can be a most rewarding and beneficial experience. Consciously choosing to not eat as a way of expressing concern about political or social conditions is a strong demonstration of inner strength. Furthermore, a "side-effect" of political fasting is often improved health and increased vigor and vitality. And finally, no one who fasts, whether it is for three days or thirty, can emerge from the experience without being changed in some way. Indeed it can be said that not eating provides a unique and satisfying kind of nourishment for body, mind, and soul.

How to Prepare for a Fast

There is no best time to fast, though ideally a fast should be undertaken when one feels strong, both physically and emotionally. The faster should be clear about why the fast is being done, and what she/he realistically hopes to achieve by fasting. It is also helpful to prepare by reading some of the literature on fasting and by talking with others who have fasting experience.

Fasting places special demands on the body and the mind, demands that it is not always possible to anticipate. The best possible preparation for a long fast (seven days or more) is a series of short fasts, twenty-four to forty-eight hours, repeated regularly every eight or fifteen days. These practice fasts act as a conditioning in which a person gets familiar with the fasting procedure, in much the same manner as a runner trains for a long race by running shorter distances on a regular basis. In this way we become familiar with our reactions to the actual fasting conditions and know better what to expect during the long fast. Short fasts have another distinct advantage in that they may be undertaken safely by anyone, even those not in the best of health, whereas a long fast, because of the more rigorous demands it places on the faster, may be inadvisable for those in less than good health. If there is a health problem known or suspected which you think may interfere with your ability to fast, it is strongly recommended that you consult a health practitioner prior to beginning a fast.

Before beginning a long fast it is advisable to arrange your schedule so that you will not have undue pressure related to work, school, and family. Leave yourself time for daily walks, naps, meditating, and reading. With food preparation and eating no longer part of the daily routine you will find yourself with many extra hours: the days may seem longer than usual. Try to do something pleasurable with your hands--sewing, weaving, knitting, carving, writing, playing a musical instrument, etc.

Support from friends is very important during a fast. There should be people nearby who are sympathetic and supportive of the fast and who you can talk to when you feel like it. It is very comforting to know there are others who share your objectives in fasting, even though they may not be fasting themselves. (see further discussion on support, pp. 18 - 19)

Fasting with others has some distinct advantages. Fasters are able to draw support and encouragement from each other. It is reassuring to know there are others directly involved with the same experience and with whom one can talk or just be around from time to time.

Arrange to have available a supply of fresh, pure water from the best available source, preferably unflouridated and unchlorinated.² Though individual needs will differ, you should

drink at least three quarts--12 glasses--of water per day.³ You can watch the concentration of your urine to monitor the amount of liquid you need. In general, if the urine is dark and has a strong odor you're not taking in enough fluid.

If possible, eat lightly--salads, steamed vegetables and fruits--for at least twenty-four hours before beginning a long fast. This tapering off of food intake provides body and mind with a gradual introduction into the fasting rhythm.

Progressively diminish the intake of stimulants (alcohol, tea, coffee, tobacco) and sugar prior to beginning a fast. Abstain from those for the duration of the fast. Most people who use these substances regularly are somewhat dependent upon them. If they are suddenly withdrawn, along with food, illness and/or severe physical and emotional trauma may result.

And finally, arrange to have a quiet place where you can sit, read, and take frequent naps during the fast. The pace and the noise of the world will seem accentuated during the fast. It is important to have a haven, a place to which you can withdraw when you feel like it.

Physiological Components of the Fast

Most of us living in rich countries eat more than we need to survive: the rhythm of our meals does not correspond to what our body actually needs, nor is this daily food intake needed to replace expended body reserves.⁴ In fact, most people can safely fast thirty days without in any way depriving themselves of body fuel needed to sustain life.⁵

During the fast the body goes through a remarkable process of adaptation, switching from the energy source to which it is accustomed (food) and drawing energy instead from the reserves of fat stored under the skin and in the abdomen.⁶ In short, the fuel needed to maintain normal, healthy body function is provided from what is already stored in the body. This process of body adaptation to the fast demonstrates once again the body's remarkable resiliency and ability to survive in different situations. It should be emphasized, however, that each individual will differ with respect to this adaptation depending upon the physical and emotional state of the faster prior to beginning the fast.

During a long fast the body goes into a slowed period, a lowering of the basal metabolic rate. Body movements and gestures are slower and more deliberate, there is an increased need for sleep, and more external heat is needed to maintain normal body temperature. To compensate for this loss of heat, fasters will want to wear or have available warm clothing and should minimize, if possible, exposure to cold air and cold water. In general one should avoid extremes of either temperature or humidity as these make it more difficult to maintain body heat. This again is a way to conserve energy.

The ability of the body to adapt and survive during the fast also depends on other variables such as body size, percentage of body fat, and general physical condition prior to beginning the fast. This is why short training fasts are such an important pre-requisite to a long fast: they give the faster an idea of what to expect and provide first-hand experience in dealing with some of the reactions which result from not eating.

The reactions discussed below are those most commonly experienced by fasters, though it is important to remember that their intensity and duration will vary from individual to individual.

1. Feelings of hunger. These generally last only three or four days. Thereafter one is not particularly attracted to or interested in food.
2. Greatly reduced bowel elimination and/or constipation. This can often be alleviated by taking frequent walks, drinking more water, doing gentle abdominal exercises, and taking an occasional enema.⁸ Enemas should be administered with body temperature water.
3. Foulness of breath and furred tongue. This condition generally lasts only a few days and is a result of the excretion of body waste and toxins. Drinking more water and gently brushing the residue off the tongue will help expedite this elimination.
4. Changes in the skin such as pimples and rash. These again, are part of the body's natural elimination of toxins, an elimination accelerated by the fast. These usually disappear after a few days. If possible bathe or take a sponge bath each day as this will cleanse the skin and make it easier for the body to eliminate through the pores.
5. Reduced sex drive. This is part of the body's natural impulse to conserve energy.

6. Other reactions experienced include nausea, stomach cramps, occasional rapid heart beat, edema (swelling, particularly of the ankles), and headaches. These symptoms will generally disappear after the first four or five days. If, however, they persist, it is recommended that the faster consult a health practitioner, preferably one familiar with the body's reactions to fasting.

Precautions During the Fast

1. Don't stand up too quickly. Since your blood pressure, respiration, and heart rate are reduced, you may experience faintness.¹⁰ If this happens be sure to put your head between your legs or lie down with your feet elevated.
2. If you are on medications the effect of these may be enhanced or reduced. If you have any doubt, consult with your health practitioner. It is advised to not use drugs, legal or illegal, during the fast.

Who Should Not Fast

Women who are pregnant or nursing should not undertake a long fast, though they may fast 24 hours without danger or discomfort.

Persons who have a physical or emotional disorder that they think may interfere with their ability to fast, or that may become worse during a fast, should consult their health practitioner.

Psychological Components of the Fast

Although the psychology of the fasting experience has been studied and written about at considerable length, individual reaction to the fast varies greatly.¹¹ Some people, for example, feel strong and calm during a fast and can deal evenly and responsibly with anything that comes along. Others find that decision making is difficult during a fast: they prefer not to have to make choices, no matter how simple. There are, however, some general guidelines which are helpful in understanding the psychological dimensions of the fast.

First, it is useful to appreciate the difference between hunger and appetite. Hunger is a body need which has a physiological basis: the sensation of true hunger and its accompanying reaction - eating - is necessary to sustain human life. Appetite, on the other hand, is essentially a psychological impulse which motivates one to seek pleasure through the act of eating. It is always or nearly always appetite and not hunger which motivates us to eat three times a day.

When we voluntarily stop eating we begin a process which eventually will replace appetite with true hunger. During a prolonged fast, true hunger generally appears at 25 to 45 days of fasting. The feeling of extreme appetite, which we commonly call hunger, places significant psychological demands on the faster, particularly during the first few days of the fast.

Second, fasting tends to bring out the psychological traits which are present in the faster prior to the fast. Thus a person who is anxious and nervous will likely feel even more anxious and nervous during the fast. Similarly, one who is calm and meditative will likely feel even more immersed in these feelings during the fast. Fasting brings feelings to the surface of our consciousness. This increased sensitivity means the faster is more likely to react or over-react to situations which would normally bring forth little or no reaction.

Three of the most commonly experienced feelings during the fast are social detachment, depression, and boredom.

Social detachment is strongly experienced by many people who fast, mainly because by not eating the faster automatically separates him/herself from all the people in the world who are still eating. Fasters are generally very aware of how much and how often others eat and how obsessed people are with food. The withdrawal from the eating ritual, including the sharing of food with family and friends, is a significant departure from normal daily routine. Some people miss this, others find it very liberating to not have to think about food. If possible, try to spend this time, when you would normally be eating, gathering or preparing food, with friends who share your commitment to the fast. Some people find

preparing and planting a garden for use after the fast, a very useful and satisfying way to spend time during the fast.

Depression and irritability are also commonly experienced. Fasters are frequently annoyed by things which would not usually be bothersome. While fasting, one is more likely to overreact to what others say and do. For this reason it is recommended that each faster be accompanied by a companion, especially during potentially stressful situations.

The days during the fast often seem interminably long: the result is often boredom and monotony. If possible, arrange to fill up as many of those hours as possible with things you really enjoy doing. This is a good opportunity to rest, write letters, meditate, visit with friends, contemplate the magnificence of nature and solitude. It is said that there is a calm and happy place in every person, no matter how well hidden or obscure. Fasting often brings feelings of happiness and contentment to the surface where they can do the most good in our lives. There is something vastly comforting and satisfying about the fast, discovering that one has the strength and will power needed for such an important task.

How To End A Fast

How one terminates the fast is very important: severe illness can result from eating too much, too rapidly, or the wrong kinds of food following a prolonged period of not eating.¹² After a long fast the body is not accustomed to accepting and processing food in the normal manner. The mind, too, needs time to once again get used to the idea of eating.

Much has been written about how to end a fast. Many writers suggest rather complicated re-eating regimens. What follows is an example of a simple method but one which is reasonable and medically sound.

During the first two days eat no animal products (meat, milk, fish, cheese, eggs). Drink water from boiled grains, preferably brown rice and barley. Drink water from prunes which have been soaked 24-36 hours. Drink diluted (50/50 with water) fruit or vegetables juices.

On the third day begin slowly introducing the customary foods, placing special emphasis on raw greens and occasional fresh ripe fruits.

Returning slowly to the normal diet is the hardest part of the fast. One is often tempted to eat excessively. Maintaining the discipline of the fast in the days following the fast is as important as the discipline of the fast itself. The fast has not really ended until the period of gradual food reintroduction has been completed.

Remember, too, that fasting should be done slowly, a day at a time. Your original ideas and objectives about the fast may change, or your physical or emotional state may make it necessary to break the fast sooner than anticipated. If done in the spirit of truth, a fast for one day is as significant as a fast for one hundred days.

The following suggestions for fasting were written by Gandhi in 1928 during a seven day fast for personal purification. While they may not be completely appropriate for the political fasts discussed in this Guide, they may nonetheless prove inspiring and of historic interest.

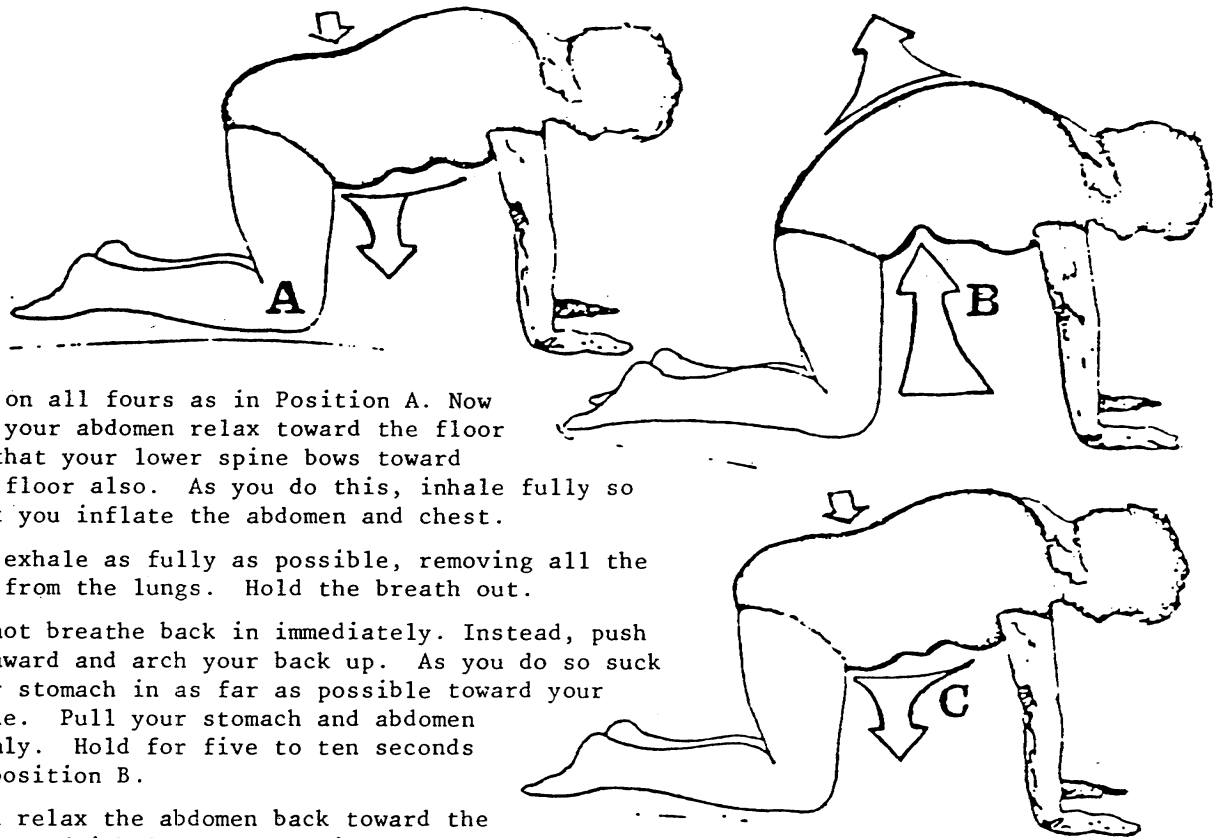
Gandhi's Guidelines For A Fast¹³

1. Conserve your energy, both physical and mental, from the very beginning.
2. **You must cease to think of food** while you are fasting.
3. Drink as much cold water as you can.
4. Have a warm sponge bath daily.
5. Take an enema regularly during the fast.¹⁴ You will be surprised at the impurities you will expel daily.
6. Sleep as much as possible in the open air.
7. Bathe in the morning air. A sun and air bath is at least as great a purifier as a water bath.
8. Think of anything else but your fast.
9. No matter from what motive you are fasting, during the precious time think of your Maker, and of your relation to Him and His other creations, and you will make discover you may not have dreamed of.

The Art of Fasting: Notes and References

1. Marchal, Dr. J.; Quelques Reflexions sur Le Jeune, Imprimerie de la Charite, Montpellier.
2. Chlorinated and Flouridated water may be improved by boiling for at least five minutes and allowing the water to stand uncovered in the open air. Sunlight exposure is also a way of purifying water.
3. Theorell, T., et al., Electrocardiographic changes during total energy deprivation (fasting) ACTA Med Scand 203:13, 1978
4. Cahill, George F., Jr., "Starvation in Man," New England Journal of Medicine, March 19, 1970, pp. 668-675.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Young, Vernon R. and Nevin S. Scrimshaw, "The Physiology of Starvation," Scientific American, October, 1971.
8. (See attached sheet).
9. Skin Manifestations: In The Minnesota study (see bibliography (Taylor)), the two most common skin changes were: The presence of an abnormal pigmentation (brownish in color) generally present around the mouth, eyes, and cheeks; and follicular hyperkeratosis (permanent goose flesh) most often found on the extensor surfaces of the upper arms and thighs. This study was not a water fast but a semi-starvation diet (1,570 Cal./day), that included solid food.
10. Theorell et al., op. cit.
11. "Behavior and Complaints in Experimental Starvation and Rehabilitation," Human Starvation, Vol. II, University of Minnesota Press, 1950, pp. 819-853.
12. Ibid.
13. Fischer, Louis, The Life of Mahatma Gandhi, New York, Harpers, 1950, p. 234.
14. Ibid.

8. An Abdominal Exercise



Get on all fours as in Position A. Now let your abdomen relax toward the floor so that your lower spine bows toward the floor also. As you do this, inhale fully so that you inflate the abdomen and chest.

Now exhale as fully as possible, removing all the air from the lungs. Hold the breath out.

Do not breathe back in immediately. Instead, push downward and arch your back up. As you do so suck your stomach in as far as possible toward your spine. Pull your stomach and abdomen firmly. Hold for five to ten seconds in position B.

Then relax the abdomen back toward the floor and inhale deeply as in C.

Repeat three to five times. With some practice you will be able to hold the posture, with the abdomen drawn in, for fifteen to thirty seconds.

PART THREE

Organizing for A Political Fast

A political fast is often one part of a struggle that must use many tactics in order to gain the breadth of support necessary to attain its goal. A fast should not be seen in isolation from other elements in a campaign. If fasters are supportive of other elements, support is more likely to be reciprocal and fasters are less likely to be, or be seen as, elitist or "holier than thou."

Goals

The meaning and purpose of the fast should be clear. This clarity should start with those initiating the fast and should be communicated thoroughly to those recruited during the training process. Such clarity will lend strength to the fast and in cases of a long fast may be essential to maintaining it. It is better to fast with a small group who are clear and united than with a large group lacking such cohesion. Consensus should be reached on a number of basic questions. Perhaps primary among these is agreement on a clear statement of the goals of the fast. Are the goals: 1. to purify the thought and spirit of the faster? 2. to facilitate meditation and prayer? 3. to express penance? 4. to express depth of concern over the seriousness of a problem? 5. to identify with the world's hungry? 6. to raise the consciousness of one's friends? 7. to confront one's friends or one's opponents with a challenge to re-examine their positions and actions, (Gandhian Satyagraha Fast)? 8. to mobilize one's friends for action on an issue? 9. to morally coerce one's opponents? 10. to politically coerce an opponent by using a fast to generate greater public pressure on them or withdrawal of public support from them, (the hunger strike)? 11. to express resistance to intolerable conditions? Clarity on goals will facilitate a decision on whether fasting is an appropriate means.

Life Risk Fasts

The decision about the length of a fast can be closely related to both the significance of the issue and the choice of goals. On a deeply important issue where change is needed to avoid catastrophe, either a long, an indefinite, or a life commitment fast may be called for. The authors share Gandhi's view that such fasts should be undertaken only after exhaustive efforts to attain the needed changes by other methods have been attempted. In addition we would add that such fasts should be undertaken only after the most careful consideration, because of the life risks involved, and only after thorough training and with the maximum organization of support to enhance the probability of success. One's judgement of the imminence of a catastrophe might place severe limits on the time available for exhausting other methods, training, and organization of support. Any fast where the risk to life is high would need far more extensive training and preparation of both participants and supporters than more limited fasts. More extensive counselling and emotional and physical support would also be needed. Of special importance would be the trainers' ability to get the fasters and their supporters to honestly look at the worst case scenario and to have them share that worst case scenario with their family, loved ones, and spiritual or personal advisers before deciding on whether to undertake such a fast.

In such training, attitudes on risking one's life, on sacrifice, martyrdom, and suicide should be shared, explored, and clarified, as should machismo and heroics. Some persons have criticized the "fast for life" suggested in the First Step Proposal as suicidal. Our view is that taking an action involving a risk of death, even a high risk, is very different than suicide, (the intentional destruction of one's life). If one is in a situation of taking a high personal risk in order to avoid the increasing probability of a catastrophe (nuclear holocaust) or the continuation of a catastrophe (world hunger), taking such a risk may be life affirming and life supporting, and actually a lesser risk. Humanity is presently on a suicidal path. Taking high risks to change our present course can be seen as prevention of suicide. The "fast for life" may cost some of us our lives. We must look long and hard at that. Do we have the faith in our cause and in the essential goodness of those who support us and those who oppose us to justify putting our lives in the balance? Our lives are, of course, already in the balance, but such an act would accelerate our moment of truth. We would expect that if we prepare ourselves adequately, a fast for life will be an act of faith and hope and not an act of desperation.

Other Important Decisions

Other important decision need to be made on: 1. Location: In a private or public place, protected or unprotected? 2. the discipline of the fast; 3. the decision-making process to be used; 4. the commitment to nonviolence; 5. the commitment to participate in training; 6. the content of the training program; 7. a commitment of mutual support including full support for those who need to break their fast earlier than planned (this latter is important if we are to avoid possible feelings of guilt and recrimination); 8. the probable social consequences of a fast for the cause, the community, the participants, the supporters, and the opponents. 9. Finally, a decision can be made on whether additional fasters or supporters are needed in which case an invitation call can be circulated to appropriate constituencies.

Finding Fasters

In our limited experience, we have been most successful in enlarging the fasting group with persons who have had experience with fasting, persons who have had experience with other high commitment tactics such as civil disobedience, persons of the Roman Catholic Left, and persons already in the peace movement.

Care should be taken to avoid pressuring persons into participation and to encourage adequate consideration of whether fasting is an appropriate action for each specific individual. Training is also screening.

Training

The content of the training program for fasters and their supporters will vary according to the goals, scope, and length of the fast. Much of the content of a training program can be drawn from this Guide. To help participants, and to save training time, this Guide or one you develop yourself, plus other resources relevant to the specific fast planned, might well be distributed a week or so before the training sessions to each participant.

Have the training sessions in a place that will allow space to divide the trainees into small groups, and open floor space to engage in role plays. Generally, training is best held in a situation affording some privacy from the general public. Whether media will be invited or allowed to cover any parts of the training is best decided ahead of time.

Following are some of the content areas that might be included in training for fasters and supporters:

1. Getting acquainted with each other as whole persons.
2. Division into temporary affinity groups to facilitate training.
3. Orientation to the situation that produced the call for the fast, including other responses that are being made to the situation.
4. Philosophy of nonviolence.
5. History of political fasting.
6. The plan for the fast: goals; discipline; decision-making; logistics and support; relations to media and public.
7. Information on how the fast is likely to affect one's mind and body.
8. Preparing oneself to fast: physical preparation; emotional and spiritual preparation; dealing with fears; relating to family, friends, community.
9. Preparing oneself to give support to fasters.
10. Role playing the fast scenario.
11. Signing up as fasters or supporters.
12. Refining of affinity group organization.
13. One on one discussions between fasters and their supporters concerning how each specific faster can use support.

For process suggestions for training, see the Coover or Olson entries in the Bibliography.

The training sessions should be held long enough in advance of the planned fast to allow the participants to get acquainted with their affinity groups and support persons, and to do one or more practice fasts.

The FASTER

Fasters are under most of the usual stresses of any political action: the stress of taking

a stand, often an unpopular one, the stress of intense activity often added on top of one's usual responsibilities, possible public hostility to one's cause, risk of harassment, physical attack, or arrest, the stress of in-group decision-making, and intergroup negotiations, etc.. On top of these, the faster is not eating. Her/his body is undergoing the stresses of various changes associated with not eating. These can affect energy levels for physical and mental activity. They can also affect clarity of thought, mood, stability, etc.. For these reasons, fasters need special education, training, and practice, as well as special types of support.

Fasting is an intense activity. Until one is accustomed to fasting, it can take lots of emotional energy. Consequently, it is probably best to get into a practice of fasting before taking on a very extended or politically demanding fast. When planning fasts of longer than one day, we would recommend recruiting participants early enough that they can do practice fasts before the public fast, unless they have had recent fasting experience. Persons without experience who join late might be encouraged to do a one day solidarity fast, or to fill some of the support roles.

Also because fasting can be intense, it is valuable to start planning early enough so that a community feeling can be nurtured among the fasters and their supporters. Ideally, major political fasts might best grow from already existing communities of experienced fasters. Short of that ideal, ample time and adequate commitment from the participants to practice and train together will help.

Supporting The Faster

Our own experience with fasting indicates that fasters often need more support than they get. To help correct this, affirm the support role and give special training for it. Be sure some of the more experienced activists do support work. This, too, will prevent support from being seen as a role of lesser importance.

Supporters need to understand and preferably to have had experience fasting themselves. Supporters might best be paired with fasters and get to know their particular needs. These needs should be explored in training. On fasts longer than one day, each faster should have a support person, preferably a personal friend, who can be with her/him frequently to check on her/his needs, and who can be present especially at physically or emotionally stressful times. If the fast is part of a vigil or other "out in public" action, and lasts more than one day, support persons should be with the group of fasters at all times, preferably at least two support persons so one can go on errands without leaving fasters alone. If the number of fasters is large, we would recommend another support person present for each additional five fasters. Even more supporters will be needed on long fasts.

In general, protect fasters as much as possible from physical and emotional stress. Go on errands for them, carry burdens for them, provide transportation if it is necessary to move very far, keep them dry and especially be sure they are warm enough, make sure they have the supplies they need, water, literature, etc., encourage them to rest frequently and provide appropriate facilities for resting both at the public scene, and away from the public scene, locate the nearest toilet facilities, remind them to drink enough water so they don't dehydrate, and protect them from too much sun. Supply them with activities they can do with their hands to reduce boredom, protect them from excessive pressure from public or media, harassment, etc., evaluate, dialogue, and counsel with them, and give them hugs. Be sure that support has medical backup if it should be needed, by physicians and other health care workers. Fasters often have ongoing family, employment, organizational, or household obligations which supporters can sometimes fulfill for them -- taking care of a child, a pet, watering a garden substituting on a job, etc..

Also train supporters to do the coordination of the fast. Coordination is too stressful an activity to be done by a faster. Train supporters to do the public outreach and media work so that the message of the fast is carried to the public. Fasting may not be understood by the public nor by those on whom the fast is focused, so care should be taken with communicating the purpose and meaning of the fast. This is particularly important for a fasting action focused on an opponent. Because fasting is legal and cannot be easily stopped by an opponent because fasting is unusual, and because fasting is often done by a small group, the opponent may attempt to prevail by discrediting the fasters as "a small group of kooks." To counter

this it is important to build public support before the fast is started. An example of this would be prominent respected persons or a large number of persons fasting one day as a support action, or signing statements of support that can be publicized.

In a long, or life commitment fast, the responsibilities of support are much more serious and can involve even the long term assumption of the faster's obligations, in case the faster dies or is injured by the fast.

Followup and Evaluation

When a fast has been completed we can continue learning from it. Such learning will be facilitated by including an evaluation process for personal and group evaluations by the fasters and their supporters. Positive and negative points can be raised and consideration given to improving future fasts. Keeping records of these evaluations can improve future planning.

A second post-fast action that will add to the value of the fast is followup on contacts and opportunities produced during the fast. Plans should include ways to plug persons into the activist community who have had their interest aroused during the fast. Plan ongoing activities that new people can incorporate into their lives. Also keep in touch with media contacts made during the fast. Such followup will be more likely to happen if its importance is emphasized during training, planning and the making of participation commitments.

If participants can be encouraged to take part in the followup, they will have a fuller appreciation of the range of action involved in an ongoing campaign. Their help will also increase your ranks and prevent the burn out that organizers sometimes experience when a public action is over.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we would again emphasize allowing sufficient time for preparation and training. If that is done, the above, as well as other needs and solutions will surface to maximize the value of the fast, and perhaps to realize Gandhi's view of its potential as the most powerful of all nonviolent means for the attainment of a just and peaceful society.

GLOSSARY

- APPETITE: A desire or longing to satisfy any conscious physical or mental need; specifically, a desire to take food; has a psychological basis.
- BASAL METABOLISM: Minimum amount of energy needed to regulate and maintain the involuntary essential life processes such as, breathing, beating of the heart, circulation of blood, cellular activity, keeping muscle in tone, and maintaining body temperature.
- FAST: In the context of this Guide, a fast is an abstinence from solid food, and limiting one's intake to water only. Medically, as long as hunger is absent, one is fasting. When hunger returns, if one continues to abstain from food, he/she is starving.
- HUNGER: The painful sensation or state of exhaustion caused by need of food; a sensation of body need which has a physiological basis.
- STARVATION: Usually defined as the point at which available fat reserves are exhausted and protein stores are converted to fuel for the maintenance of body metabolism. This will vary with each individual depending upon many factors such as, the amount of fat to begin with, activity and stress. This usually occurs after 25 to 45 days of fasting.
- TOXIN: A noxious or poisonous substance that (1) is an integral part of the cell or tissue (2) is an extra cellular product, or (3) represents a combination of the two situations, formed or elaborated during metabolism and growth of certain organisms, as well as some of the higher plant and animal species; in general toxins are relatively complex molecules, and the chemical compositions are usually not precisely known.
- WASTE: EXCREMENT - waste matter or any excretion cast out of the body; feces, urine, in perspiration, and in exhaled breath.

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