

FASTING

Swami Kriyananda



Fasting is one of Nature's ways of giving the body a chance to overcome disease and return to a state of normalcy. Animals, when they are unwell, will often instinctively fast. There is not room enough here to go into this important subject at length, but it will be helpful to mention that yogis recommend fasting, provided it is not carried to extremes. Fasting is beneficial not only physically, but also spiritually. It helps one to emphasize his freedom from bodily imperatives. Prolonged fasts under expert supervision have often been the means of curing serious physical ailments, even cancer. The student is advised to read books on the subject, readily available in any health food store.

There are different kinds of fasts: total and partial. Partial fasts include the taking of selected foods, or even of only one type of food: for example, carrot juice, or grape juice. Any kind of food intake, while in certain cases good for stimulating the elimination of poisons, will not give the body the complete rest of a total fast. Liquids (apart from water) are still food, and cause the body to work to digest it.

Yogis recommend fasting one day a week, either totally or on water only. They also suggest fasting three days once a month on fruit juices. The stomach, like the rest of the body, needs periods of rest and rejuvenation.

While fasting, try to draw energy into your body by other means. Inhale very deeply, filling your whole body with energy. Yogis recommend also a strange technique that we shall discuss in detail in a later lesson. It is known as *Kechari Mudra*. It consists of joining the tip of the tongue to the uvula (the soft, fleshy lobe that hangs from the soft palate at the back of the mouth), or with certain nerves in the nasal passages behind the soft palate. This position draws energy to the brain and body. Yogis say that bears in hibernation keep their tongues locked in this position, and thereby live through the winter without food. To join the tip of the tongue to the necessary nerves in the nasal passages is more difficult. For now, try simply joining the tip of the tongue to the uvula. I have practiced this *mudra* while fasting, and have found that my hunger disappeared.



Kechari Mudra

Before starting a fast, it is wise to take a gentle laxative so as to eliminate poisons from the intestines that will not be pushed out of the body by any fresh intake of food. On long fasts it is advisable to take a laxative every evening, until all foodstuffs have been expelled from the bowels.

Fasting is not for everyone. Some bodies can handle it easily; others find it very difficult. Yogis do not make a big point of it. The path of yoga is one of moderation in all things. When a disciple of Yogananda's guru, Sri Yukteswar, announced that he was going on a long fast, Sri Yukteswar laughed, "Why not throw the dog a bone?"

When coming off a fast be sure to eat lightly, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Heavy foods should not be introduced at the start. Rather, eat fruits and drink herb teas.