

*Including oxygen-fasting.

Note that Jesus' one recorded fast resulted not in beatific vision but in demonic temptation: fasting is dangerous, not just ambiguous!....Stoics pushed fasting for self-control and self-sufficiency, "virtues" alternative to the Bible's love-obedience....Religions originating in India push fasting as apparently confirming their ontology as monistic and placid--both, antibiblical notions.

1. In our neospiritual time, some spiritual disciplines are back, others have arrived--and fasting is both back [as it has a Western history] and come [as it's being pushed with both forms and sanctions distinctly Eastern]. Thus, a few notes from a biblical theologian.
2. Catholic Christianity has depended on OT and Hellenistic asceticism, whereas Protestantism has been generally suspicious, with NT, of the practice. As a Protestant, I've had a few experimental experiences with it,* and briefly practiced it in crises--but I share the prophetic caveats about it:
 - (1) It's self-manipulation and thus tends to center in self.
 - (2) It's under one's control and thus tends toward magic and nature-worship.
 - (3) It's self-exergized and thus tends to pride and the illusion of merit.
 - (4) Its meritorious quality tends to displace the biblical theocentric emphasis on grace: "works-righteousness according to the law," the mind-set 180° from the gospel of God's free grace.
 - (5) It tends toward personal moralism and social legalism, over against "freedom in Christ."
 - (6) It tends, like any idolatry that fastens itself on the religious, to be self-sanctioning: the faster thinks up reasons to continue, such as the extraneous notion--unproved, but quite possible--that occasional fasting is good for your physical health or [as in Stoicism] for your soul.
 - (7) In comparison with moral and ethical action in charity and justice, fasting is pseudo-ethical (a) as substitute for costly action in the world and (b) as an introjective good.
 - (8) Along with other rituals in private and public liturgy, fasting tends to desensitize to the "true religion" of sanctifying the everyday in mitzvot, deeds done for the creature in the Presence of the Creator.
 - (9) Its psychology is the psychology of denial rather than of affirmation, the focus tending to be not on anything given but on specific things withheld.
3. After using concordances and lexicons, try the following to cover all the biblical references and pertinent nonbiblical material: INTERPRETER'S DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE 2.241-244; Millar Burrows' AN OUTLINE OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY 288-293; Alan Richardson's A THEOLOGICAL WORD BOOK OF THE BIBLE 79ff; A CATHOLIC DICTIONARY OF THEOLOGY [Nelson/67] 2.284ff.
4. POLARITIES: Fasting may be involuntary [=hunger, famine, starvation] or voluntary. If the latter, public or private--and regular or occasional. The Bible's against involuntary fasting [except, and this rarely, when viewed as divine punishment or ordeal]: everybody's to have, as the Lord's Prayer has it, "daily bread," a phrase which if pressed would exclude all voluntary fasting. Jesus is on the fringes of his people's fasting praxis: he's suspicious of public fasting, as entailing obvious abuses; he doesn't encourage his disciples in regular fasting [as did Jn.Baptist], for which he's criticized; he teaches not only that fasting should be secret, but that you should groom yourself especially well when you're into it so as to conceal it from the public; he even argues that it's inappropriate in the presence of himself as "bridegroom," though it'll be appropriate for the time of mourning "when the bridegroom's taken away"; he used it at least once as a crisis discipline ["the Temptations"], but this may have been mostly from necessity in his withdrawal "into the desert"; he seems not to have pressed its use, as did many in his time, in connection with exorcism ["fasting" in M.9.29 and Mt.17.21 being, apparently, 2nd-c. glosses, to reinforce emerging Christian asceticism: Jesus, clearly, was no ascetic!]. [Other glosses: 1Cor.7.5 and Ac.10.30.]
5. The Bible, teaching the goodness of creation, is nonascetic; altered states of consciousness occur because God comes to us, not because we deprive our bodies to (1) achieve dreams-visions and (2) depress strong emotions [=self-zombieization]--though it does not discourage fasting to express strong emotions (e.g., mourning, repentance, calamity, deep supplication), "for Jesus' sake." ...and for life-simplification...and for the good earth's ecology.

Gal.4.8-11