

Thoughts on Fasting

Please join Witness Against Torture for a fast during Torture Awareness Week, June 21-26, 2021; fast for a day or two, or for the whole week, in whatever way you choose. For the past 15 years Witness Against Torture (WAT, witnessagainsttorture.com), a group of people ranging from a few dozen to over a hundred, have fasted for a week around January 11, the anniversary of the opening of Guantanamo Bay Prison. A smaller number fast once a week throughout the year. We do this in solidarity with the detainees there, and for those in our US carceral punishment system.

Reasons to fast:

- *Our fasting helps the prisoners state of mind.* When their lawyers tell the prisoners in Guantanamo that we join them – if only symbolically – in their hunger-strike protests, they feel our solidarity.
- *We are supporting their agency.* Torture deprives prisoners of their agency; hunger striking is the only control they have left over their lives. When both they and their keepers know that people on the outside advocate for them, part of what has been stolen is returned.
- *We have had an impact.* Groups of people in orange jumpsuits marching and singing in the streets stick in the mind. Sometimes the media notices; the US government, and passers-by, always notice.
- *Fasting has an effect on the faster.* As we get peckish, and want a snack, we are forced to think of the prisoners.
- *Fasting reminds us of the Muslim men in Guantanamo, and also of Leonard Peltier, Mumia Abu Jamal, and the many many others who languish in our prisons.* Since they are mostly Black and Brown, and most are poor, fasting is a way of acknowledging who is oppressed by the U.S. "justice" system.
- *Fasting can be spiritual.* There's an echo of the universal chord, a reminder that if enough of us tune in to that vibration we might make a revolution with the tools of peace, not war. Rumi says: There's a hidden sweetness in the stomach's emptiness. We are lutes, no more, no less.
(<https://www.islamicity.org/11603/joys-of-fasting-by-rumi/>)
- *Fasting can give us hope.* How do we know that fasting and forbearance will be worth the effort? We don't – but then, we know *nothing* of the future, since we have not been there yet.

How to fast:

- During WAT's January fast, most folks do a liquid-only fast including fruit and vegetable juices plus a source of protein (dairy or soy milk, yogurt, miso, etc).
- Some folks do a Ramadan fast, eating before sunrise and taking nothing by mouth, even water, until after sundown.
- Your fast should be based on what feels right for you, but here is some important information:
 - During your fast, connect with a buddy, who may or may not be fasting, to monitor you and give you feedback on how you're doing.

- If you have health issues, talk to your health provider about whether and how you should fast.
- Get plenty of liquid, including water; don't overdo high-calorie juices and caffeine drinks, and it's best to avoid alcohol.
- Get enough sodium and potassium by drinking liquids like vegetable juices, miso, or electrolyte drinks (eg, Gatorade).
- The purpose of fasting is to be in solidarity and to witness. You want to remain centered and aware, even if you get light-headed. Take time to be quiet, to think about the people you're fasting for, and to be in touch with how you are feeling.
- If you start to become dysfunctional or feel faint, the first thing to do is drink some liquid with calories. If you don't feel better, consider whether you should modify or stop your fast.