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“Protest Fasting”

We are all aware of Jesus’ fasting for 40 days and nights to overcome his archenemy—Satan.

What we may not know or might have forgotten is that other great men in history fasted also to overcome barriers.

For example, Mahatma Gandhi undertook lengthy fasts in order to empower India to wrest independence from Great Britain.

Closer to home, Martin Luther King, who adopted many of Mahatma Gandhi’s strategies, also fasted to help secure certain justices for Black Americans.

In addition, Black American activist Dick Gregory is noted for his fasting to produce change for Black America; he also highlighted the beneficial physical properties of fasting.

Coming full circle, Anna Hazare is a new voice in India who fasts to fight corruption in his country—a major factor that prevents India from growing and developing properly.

Given the power and results-producing-nature of fasting for a cause, and given that Black Americans are in dire need of social change, we should ask “Why doesn’t Black American leadership exploit fasting as a strategy?”

Today’s leaders appear to count on their organizational and strategic skills to produce the change that they desire. However, the state of Black America reveals that those skills are lacking.

Would these leaders be more successful if they employed fasting?

Why not fast in protest of the US Congress’ failure to allocate sufficient funds to fight blatant forms of discrimination? Why not fast to protest the use of adverse stereotypical images in media? Or why not fast to halt discriminatory practices in financial markets against Black Americans?

There is something compelling about fasting. No question, self-immolation sends a definitive but defeatist call for change. Yes a life is sacrificed, but it is over too quickly. However, there is something painfully penetrating to the hearts and minds of onlookers when a person puts his/her life on the line for their people—not to be simply snuffed out, but to potentially suffer agonizingly by fasting to the end of life itself.

Why don't today's Black American leaders commit themselves to fasts to help create the type of change that we need?

It could be that they have become accustomed to enjoying too much good food and drink as they negotiate for change; consequently, it is difficult for them to sacrifice.

It is difficult to get excited or motivated when the belly is full. It is another matter altogether when the stomach is empty and the fire of fasting is burning inside.

But let us not leave it to our leaders. Let us consider fasting ourselves. It is a great way to establish discipline. It is a fine way to save. And it is a fantastic way to recapitulate on what is important in our lives now and for the future.

As we move deeper into the 21st century with limited progress on large issues facing Black America, maybe we should try fasting.

It can purify our hearts and minds, motivate, and renew us in a powerful way to seek the type of change that is required to take Black America to where we ought to be.

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