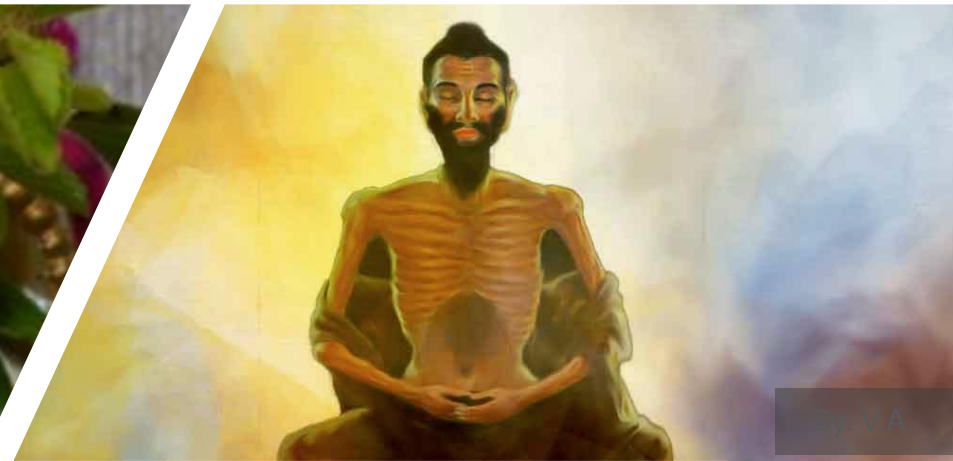




Why do we do this in Indian Culture?

Part 2



Why do we fast?

Fasting is also called Upasaava in Sanskrit!

- Upa = “near”
- Saava = “to stay”

Upavaasa means to stay near the lord (no you are not literally next to him. You are spiritually.

So, what does that have to do with food???

- We spend a lot of time on food. From buying food, to preparing food, to eating food and then digesting food. And some foods makes our minds dull and agitated. - Remember as saying goes: You are what you eat!
- When we eat healthy and fresh food or stop eating altogether (for short time) we keep our mind alert and pure, making mind more focused and with payer during those time we can be focused and closer to god.

Also, when we eat food, we are indulging in our senses – We eat what we link like sweets, chips, ice cream, pizza, etc. When we fast, we teach our body and mind to control ourselves.

Sorry!



Will Be Back Soon!

Why do we fast?

- Fasting gives rest to our digestive organs.
- It helps our bodies to cleans itself of impurities.

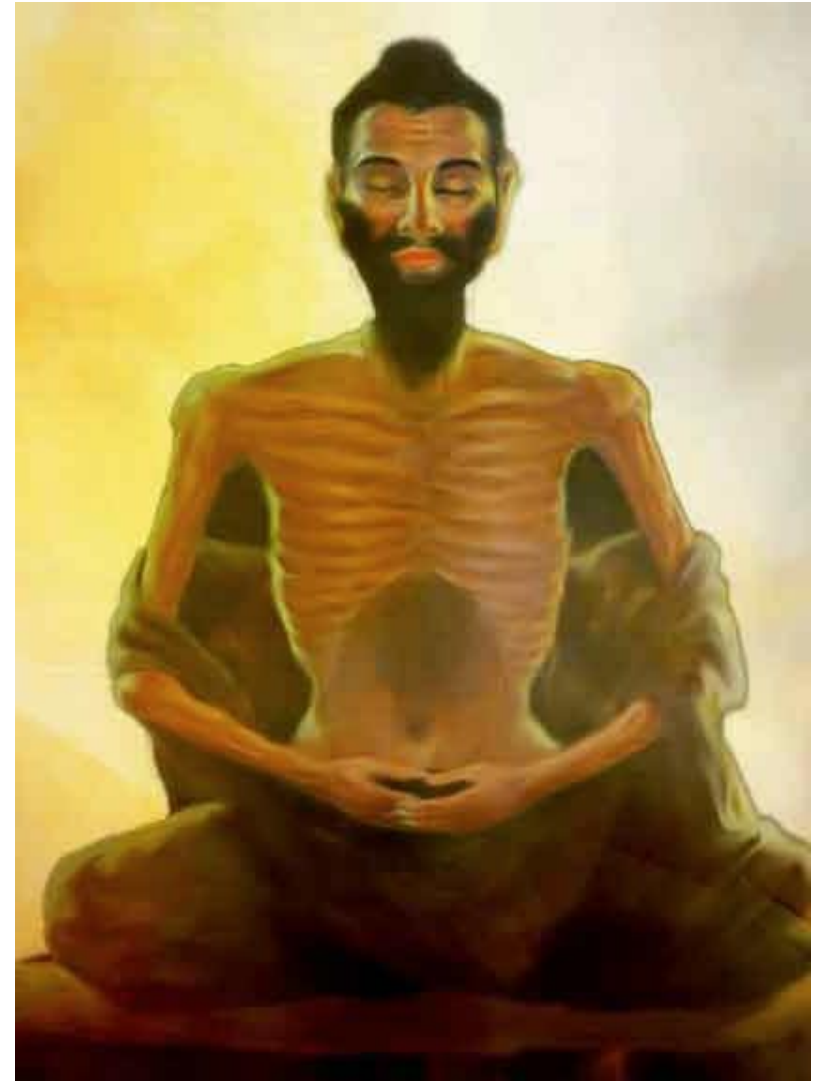
Fasting does not always mean no food.

Fasting can be done with lowering the portion of food you in take. For example, if you normally eat three roties, you can choose to eat one when fasting.

You can choose to eat lighter foods – Fruits for example.

Many of the fasting periods in our culture happen when seasons are changing. Why?

- When season are changing, say from summer to winter, the environment around us is changes – temperature falls, leaves on the trees are changing, the pollen changes, etc.
- Similarly, there are changes happening in our body as it is adapting to changing environment, we are living in. By fasting during this season changes we are providing our bodies energy to adapt to the change instead of having to spend it on collection, cooking and digesting food.



Why do we not touch books with our feet?

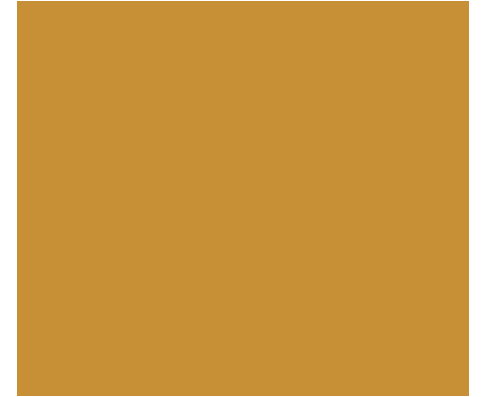
Feet – considered the most unclean part of the body.

All Knowledge (jnan or gyan) is important in our culture

- Knowledge can be found in books. When we step on them, we are touching them with the most unclean part of our body in turn disrespecting knowledge inside books.

We also do not touch people with our feet.

- Our soul is seen as a part of god. So, when we touch a person with our feet, it is like we are stepping on god and disrespecting him.



Why do we offer a coconut?

There was also a time when Hindus did animal sacrifice, but we stopped doing that and used coconuts instead

Why?

Where do we offer coconuts?

In Hinduism Coconut is very important part of many rituals:

- In Weddings
- During Puja
- Break Coconut before entering temples
- When we purchase a new vehicle – in some families we perform puja where we break open a coconut
- On top of Kalash



There are many reasons why coconuts is important to our culture:

The coconut symbolizes the head of a human.

- The hard shell represents our skull, the fibers represent hair and the three mark represent our eyes – two physical and third eye.

Breaking of Coconut:

The hard shell represent the persons' anger, ego, all the negative thoughts and qualities

The juice inside represents human tendencies (*vasanas*) / desires.

The white fruit represents the mind is offered to god

Thus....

The mind purified by the touch of the Lord is used as prasad.



The three marks on the coconut also symbolizes Shiva's three eyes.





Coconut - the purest fruit we can offer to God.

- It is not polluted as it remains covered by the hard outer shell until it is offered to the God.
- There is no pure untouched water on this planet than tender coconut water. The water has a divine quality as it contains many nutrients.



The coconut and the coconut tree is also a symbol of selfless service, as every part of the tree can be used.

- The trunk, leaves, fruit... everything can be used to make thatches, mats, food, oil, soap, the list goes on and on!



Fun Facts:

- Something cool that coconuts can do is that it can purify salt water and make it drinkable!
- Coconuts are also used in ayurvedic medicine and other medicine systems.

Why do we offer food to god?

Food that has been offered to god is called Prasaad!

When we give food to god, we are appreciating the strength and knowledge god has given us.

- In the aarti song “Jai Jagdish Hare,” the phrase “tera tujko arpan” means “I offer what is yours to you.”
- This makes us think of prasaad as a gift from god, and suddenly we think about prasaad differently from regular food. (Prasaad is always good food because you want to offer god the purest and best food you can!)
- We always share prasaad. We should not complain about eating prasaad because it is always good for us. We eat prasaad happily because prasaad is god’s gift.





Why is the lotus flower special?

The Lotus Flower symbolizes truth, luck, and beauty. These are all characteristics that we see in god.

- Lotuses also remain beautiful even though they live and grow in swampy water. This tells us that even though our environment around us is bad, we still can be pure and beautiful.
- Lotus leaves also never get wet even though they are in water. This symbolizes the wise man, who is always happy, even if the world around him is filled with sorrow.

Lotuses bloom when the sun rises and closes once it is night, just like how our minds should be open and expand when there is light representing knowledge and close in darkness .

Why are trees and plants sacred?

- Every life on earth has a bit of god in them. Therefore humans, animals, plants and trees are all seen to have life in them and hence are sacred.
- Human life also depends on plants, plants give us food, oxygen, clothing, shelter, medicine and more. They also make nature beautiful

What happens when we need to cut down trees?

- Hindu culture says that if we need to cut down a tree, we must plant 10 more. We also must apologize to the tree for cutting it down.
- We should also try to use as much of the tree as possible, and to be resourceful. We should not waste the tree and should use it for food and shelter.

Some plants are really important! Hindus worship plants like the Tulasi and Peepal that are known to have beneficial qualities.



Why do we use / worship kalasha?

Kalasha – a copper, brass or mud pot (usually it is copper), filled with water and Mango leaves placed in the mouth of the pot and a coconut is placed over it. A red or white thread is tied around its neck.

- The water in it represents the cosmic water from which entire creation emerged from.
- The mango leaves and coconut symbolize creation.
- The red or white thread represents the love that “blinds” all in world.

Kalasha also is used because of its ability harness the cosmic energies.

- Similarly to above, the water in the copper pot represents the cosmic water from which all life comes from.
- The mango leaves serve as the seat for the deities.
- The coconut symbolically attracts the divine energy from the atmosphere which it is then transmitted to the water in the kalash through the body of coconut and on to the worshippers through the best conductor – the copper pot.
- The red or white thread around the Kalash symbolizes the threads which bind us all together with bonds of love and compassion enshrined in the Divine spark within us all.



Why is Kalasha full of rice is pushed by a newlywed woman when entering home for the first time?

- A woman is often referred to as Lakshmi in Hindu households. When she becomes a part of a family after marriage, she represents the Lakshmi of the house.
- It is from the doorstep that Goddess Lakshmi (wealth and prosperity) enters the house. She exits from the same door. So when a newlywed bride enters the house, she gently kicks a Kalash full of rice grains by her right foot toward inside of the house -- so as to push wealth and prosperity inside the house.
- With her entry, she symbolizes the entry of good luck, wealth and prosperity.

