Fasting and Feasting 2020

A Spiritual Practice for Lent
Dynamic Lent: A New Insight

By Rev. Eric Butterworth

Every year in late February or early March the Lenten season begins. It is, or can be, a marvelous experience in self-improvement. In a way, Lent is coincidental with spring, the season of new growth in nature. The trees and flowers are not content with the blooms of last year. And if we are in the flow of the creative process, we experience divine discontent, in which we feel both the possibility and the need for growth …

Lent can be a dynamic experience if it is approached with the will toward honest self-examination, self-discipline, and self-commitment.

Whether or not you follow the observance of Lent, consider its metaphysical application. Turn from the simple act of giving up things to a more positive commitment to take up the practice of high-level thinking … Form the habit of reaching for the highest point of view in all your dealings …

If you have been letting things get you down, take up the idea that you are the master of your thought world. No matter what people say or do, no matter what may happen around you, take up the idea, “Why should I let these things determine how I am going to think or act?” Keep the spirit of joy, the attitude of gratitude, in good times and bad …

Lent can be a dynamic experience, not by what you give up as much as by what you take up … It can be a time of great believing leading to great overcoming and great living!

Excerpted from Celebrate Yourself! by Eric Butterworth (Unity Books, 1984)

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Lent is a season.

First, it is a season of preparation for Easter. Beginning with Ash Wednesday on February 26, 2020, we will count 40 days plus six Sundays until Easter on April 12.

Lent also coincides with a change of seasons. During this period, the northern hemisphere will move from winter into spring, so Lent is often symbolized by a return of sun and flowers.

However, Lent is not simply a season of renewal. It is also a period of reflection and release. We must face crucifixion before we celebrate resurrection, must look at the shadow then turn to the light without flinching from either. We sweep away any thoughts that block our good before we affirm statements of Truth to guide our days.

Release, then renewal.

Our Lenten booklet this past year was based on a poem called “Fasting and Feasting,” originally written by William Arthur Ward. The idea of abstaining from what does not serve us in order to nourish ourselves with something more positive resonated deeply with our readers. We printed thousands more booklets to meet the demand.

So profound was the effect that we asked Rev. Teresa Burton, the editor of Daily Word magazine, to create our own version of “Fasting and Feasting” for Lent 2020. The double essays on facing pages of this booklet suggest a quality to be released then one to be developed—to fast from what does not serve us and feast on the greater good.

Essays for the Sundays in Lent were taken from two revered Unity writers, Revs. Eric Butterworth and James Dillet Freeman, who advanced the original teachings of New Thought with modern language and understanding. They died within days of each other in April 2003.

We hope you enjoy, study, and use this booklet to enhance your experience of the Lenten season and renew your awareness of your own Christ nature.

Your Friends in Unity
I fast from doubt.
I feast on faith.

I fast from fear.
I feast on courage.

I fast from insecurity.
I feast on feeling confident.

I fast from distraction.
I feast on being fully present.

I fast from loneliness.
I feast on connection.

I fast from hiding behind a mask.
I feast on being my authentic self.

I fast from overreacting.
I feast on responding thoughtfully.

I fast from competition.
I feast on cooperation.

I fast from apathy.
I feast on enthusiasm.

I fast from feeling stuck.
I feast on moving forward.

I fast from limitation.
I feast on freedom.

I fast from being rigid.
I feast on resilience.

I fast from stress.
I feast on serenity.

I fast from chaos.
I feast on order.

I fast from confusion.
I feast on clarity.

I fast from resistance.
I feast on acceptance.

I fast from false starts.
I feast on determination.

I fast from overindulgence.
I feast on self-care.

I fast from the fear of scarcity.
I feast on the assurance of abundance.

I fast from self-pity.
I feast on renewal.

—Adapted by Rev. Teresa Burton
from a poem by William Arthur Ward
Denials and Affirmations
By Rev. Teresa Burton

The word fasting might make you think of deprivation and discomfort and the need for willpower to overcome an unwanted habit, just as the word feasting might conjure memories of an abundant supply of beauty, serenity, loving, and supportive relationships, or even sumptuous food.

From a spiritual perspective, however, fasting and feasting align with the tools of spiritual growth called denials and affirmations. Fasting from unwanted beliefs and feasting on Truth statements can, quite literally, change the way you see the world.

Before the feast must come the fast.

DENIALS
“Out with the old, in with the new.” It’s a familiar phrase, often called to mind when it’s time to freshen a wardrobe or update furniture or household appliances. It can also apply to the way you live. When thoughts and beliefs hold you back, you can start to change your beliefs with denials.

Denials help to clear out limiting, self-sabotaging beliefs so that when it’s time to feast on affirmations they can exert their transformative power. It’s tempting to want to go directly to the feast, but affirmations can’t take root in consciousness if they are blocked by limiting thoughts.

It’s natural not to want to trudge through unpleasant memories to uncover self-sabotaging beliefs. But it’s important to undertake denials without judgment about holding “negative” thoughts, so be gentle and loving with yourself as you get in touch with thinking that no longer aligns with the life you wish to live.

Once you become aware of your limiting beliefs, you can begin to eradicate them by denying they have lasting, enduring truth. This action robs the limiting belief of its power and cleanses it from your mind. With the limiting belief no longer in mind, it’s time to feast on affirmations.

AFFIRMATIONS
Words of affirmation are not wishful thinking or a way to try to get something you don’t have. Rather, affirmations help you deeply realize that everything you could ever need or want is already yours at the level of consciousness. It is this realization that helps you bring forth desired results.

Just as you might go to a gym to become physically healthy, so, too, should you use affirmations to change consciousness. If you go to a gym only every once in a while, it’s likely that you won’t grow stronger. Likewise, if you are haphazard with affirmations, it’s unlikely that your thinking will change. It’s the regular, repeated affirmation of words of Truth that is transformative. In this booklet, each day’s statement of feasting is an affirmation.

Words have power. Words of Truth repeated in prayerful contemplation and in waking life take root and grow. As your consciousness is infused with Truth, the Truth you know becomes the life you live. That’s the Truth that sets you free.
I fast from doubt.

Consider the poignant plea in Mark 9:24: “I believe; help my unbelief!”

What if we were able to see doubt as part of the process of faith, not the opposite of faith? How might this change our approach to doubt?

It is often easier to brush aside doubts and simply declare our faith. Yet there are gifts—nuggets of truth and freedom—to be found in doubt.

In fasting from doubt I can notice and honor my thoughts and feelings and ask myself: What is this about? What I gain from my inquiry into my doubt is infinitely stronger than any blind faith. Whenever doubt weighs me down, I can lovingly and gently go deeper with my doubt.

Is my doubt rooted in fear? Perhaps it is a sense of unworthiness or lack? Maybe a past experience is coloring my perception and causing me to question. I’m not giving in to doubt or turning away from it, but gently excavating to find and release its roots within me. The way out of doubt is through it.

I fast from doubt and inquire within: What do I know to be true?

I feast on faith.

When I feast on faith, my mind turns to these beautiful words by James Dillet Freeman in Angels Sing in Me (Unity Books, 2004):

Faith is not so much a matter of the mind as of the heart. Sometimes in seeking to understand God as principle, we lose sight of God as a presence … To have faith is not to theorize about God or even to imagine God, but to experience God …

Faith is a warmth, a feeling of well-being that envelops the body and overflows the mind. Faith brings an inward peace, a tranquil spirit.

Faith is the expectation of the unexpected. Faith is an open and courageous heart …

Faith is the power to see in the disappointment of today the fulfillment of tomorrow, in the end of old hopes the beginning of new life. Faith is the inward power to see beyond the outward signs, the power to know that all is right when everything looks wrong …

Sometimes you may have more faith than you can imagine, and when you need it, you will find it there within you.

I feast on faith. In the face of doubt, fear, or disappointment, I feast on faith. I open my heart to an experience of presence and inward power and knowing that sustains and energizes my very being. I feast on faith.

—Rev. Mark Fuss
Unity World Headquarters
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2020

I fast from fear.

When I am distracted from my Truth, I find it easy to let feelings of fear slip in as though they are the celebrated guests of honor. Everywhere I turn—headlines, email, social media posts, and even friendly conversations—I encounter fear-generating mechanisms. Fear only holds open the door for more fear to enter.

Like a paralyzing force that stands between me and my next right step forward, fear tries to take the upper hand. My humanity reminds me of the existence of fear as a feeling, and when I focus on the fear itself, sometimes that’s all I can see.

When I summon the courage to break free from the distraction fear creates, I can shift my perspective to the space of possibility. From within this space, breath by breath, I experience an excavation of the soul that invites the resilient, courageous, and beautiful presence within—which is waiting just beyond the thought, word, or deed—to step into the light.

In the presence of the Truth of my being, I count many feelings, ideas, and emotions, and the feelings of fear are no longer visibly present to me.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2020

I feast on courage.

Fear’s message hails from the canon of cannot, while the call of courage heralds the presence of possibility. Courage does not take a backseat to fear; it forges a new path where fear dare not tread.

I recall my elementary school journey as one that was quietly wrought with hopes of one day outrunning, overcoming, and potentially outsmarting the playground purveyors of fear. Instead, something much better happened: I learned to lay down the burden and weight of fear and put on a measure of courage.

I am reassured by Deuteronomy 31:6 in the contemporary language of The Message by Eugene H. Peterson: “Be strong. Take courage. Don’t be intimidated. Don’t give them a second thought because God, your God, is striding ahead of you. God’s right there with you and won’t leave you or let you down.”

Even the smallest inkling of courage can upstage the most significant amount of fear. At that moment, know that all things are possible.

—Rev. Kathy Beasley
Speaker, Teacher, Orlando, Florida