



Inspirational Emails

The Value of Fasting

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The ancient Greeks abhorred extremes. The two poles of life were what they called *enkrateia*, or self-control, and its opposite *akolasia*, excess. For the Greeks the key to life was living in the balance between them, summed up in the Delphic aphorism **"Nothing too much."**



My postmodern rule of thumb takes the Greeks one further: **everything in moderation, including moderation.** Practice everyday abstinence and self-control in one's eating habits. But every now and then be "naughty" and eat what's bad for you. My mother called such naughty times "splurges." Mary Oliver speaks of our need to write into the poem of our lives a few "wild stanzas." Theodore Roszak calls these same periodic naughty episodes "sustainable extravagances."

The norm is moderation and fasting. The exception that proves the norm is period "naughtiness." **Fasting is good for the body and soul.** Clearly fasting relates to larger issues than meat and drink. *"One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4 NRSV). **Fasting can connect us to those around the world who live with hunger every day.** It is one thing to starve yourself (fasting); it is quite another to be starved by others or by forces beyond your control (famine). **Both moderation and fasting can help us identify with those who have gone before us as well as what is going on around us.**



from "Learn to Dance the Soul Salsa" by Leonard Sweet, PhD