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Indonesian Shamanic Methods of Fasting & Austerities

Fasting and asceticism are essential practices in Javanese Kejawen and shamanism--especially Indonesian shamanism. Most of the unusual and unique powers acquired in Indonesian occultism are dependent upon the mastery of these disciplines with their many forms and variations. Another important factor that must not be overlooked in the acquisition of these occult powers is the knowledge of the correct timing such as the proper month and day which magickal rites and disciplines are to be commenced, and this is intrinsically linked with the Javanese calendar; this however, will not be dealt with in this article for it is beyond its scope. We will mainly focus on the many variations of fasting and the austerities carried-out in Javanese mysticism/occultism.

Fasting as a religio-spiritual practice is known the world over by modern and ancient cultures. Initially, fasting was the result of the inaccessibility of food and proper nourishment in the face of lack and poverty. It was later adopted by the religious/shamanic community for magickal and devotional purposes as it was found to provide certain interesting results psychologically, biologically, and metaphysically. The ancient grimoires, both eastern and western, are filled with rituals that require fasting as a preparation for the work.

Modern researches on fasting reveals that the practice results in health and in a regeneration of the physical body when done rationally and not carried into extremes. Fasting maintains one's health as it provides the needed rest to the digestive organs.

From the magickal perspective, fasting has an occult effect on both mind and body. Shamanic fasting changes the polarity of the physical body and also raises its vibrations, making it sensitive to the magickal frequencies imperceptible to the five senses. It especially sensitizes the autonomic nervous system making it a fine receptor for receiving psychic impressions that are overlooked by the nerves of the central nervous system.

Psychologically, fasting induces a certain borderline state making the mind susceptible to data fed into it in the form of affirmations, mantras, and prayers, and thus strengthening subconscious response to the information given. Fasting likewise orients the mind to the spirit within making it conducive for inner attunements and communications to take place with the Cosmic Mind and the various intelligences composing It. The increased vibrations of the body, cleansed of all toxic matter through fasting makes it possible for the attraction of certain types of spirit beings that normally would not come into close proximity to us because of the noxious affluvia that we emanate. Indonesian shamanism urges one to fast on one's natal day (according to the Javanese calendar) to accumulate extra power and to strengthen the relationship with one's guardian angel and what they call the "four spirit brothers."

There is no denying that fasting aids the etheric body to accumulate cosmic power, especially when done in conjunction with the appropriate metaphysical exercises. Without physical nourishment, the body is forced to acquire the energy it needs through some other channels. When adopted as a regular practice, fasting unfolds psychic sensitivity.

As a spiritual discipline, fasting teaches one to refrain from greed in all of its hideous forms. It is a practical reminder of the injunction of the Master Jesus: "to be in this world, but not of it." Fasting, when accompanied with contemplation and spiritual reflection, causes beneficial changes in one's psyche. By fasting from the things of this world one would find oneself being nourished by the Divine Spirit, as Nature hates a vacuum. One would become a "god-eater" where physical nourishment becomes superfluous. This is, of course, quite an advance stage.

Generally speaking, during the period of fasting/austerities one should refrain from generating negative thoughts, feelings, and actions and should be busily engaged in spiritual works. It is a time of introspection and the reaching out (in) for the divinity within us. One's thoughts ought to be kept at a lofty level. If the fasting is related to a magickal ritual, the meditation or mantras of the work ought to be conducted or recited during the fast. The intention of the abstention of food and drink must be affirmed and impressed upon the subconscious mind ere the commencement of the ritual itself.

In Javanese mysticism, fasting is normally carried out during certain months of the Javanese calendar, such as the month of *Sura*, as these months are considered conducive to spiritual activities. Fasting periods are between 1--40-days. Auspicious days to commence one's fasting from the Kejawenese point of view are *Kliwon*-Tuesday, *Legi*-Wednesday, and *Pahing*-Thursday. Fasts/austerities ought to be preceded by a holy wash/ritual cleansing, as this puts one into the proper frame of mind--aside from its other metaphysical benefits.

During fasting and the conducting of the austerities, one would indubitably encounter varied forms of temptations, visions, and physical discomfort that would thwart one's efforts. This is partially the result of the body elemental's protest against the discipline imposed. Because of its puerile and irrational nature, it will not accept anything that would upset its routine work.

Fasting and austerities brings out the worst in us onto the surface--and this is indeed a blessing as we would be made aware of all the neurosis, psychosis, and complexes lurking within the psyche that requires our attention in the art of transmutation. These dark elements are often projected onto the consciousness in the forms of hallucinations and illusions. This is one of the alchemical stages symbolically described by the mages of old. When these forms arise one should understand what they represent or interpret their symbolical nature. Knowing what they are is the first step of getting rid of them, of which would consequently make it easier for the empowerment of one's psyche and the raising of one's magickal power-level. It should be noted that even though such blocks are removed, one still has the source of the problem lying deep within in our spiritual forgetfulness and divine ignorance. They are like tentacles belonging to an unseen creature which if not killed, new limbs would form. However, we are digressing; this topic goes beyond the scope of this present article.

One thing more should be mentioned: traditionally, we are informed that inspirations, visions, and intuitive impressions of worth occurs from 1 am to dawn. It is said that during this period the impressions emanate from a divine source. At other nocturnal periods they issue forth from the subconscious mind or from spirit beings of the lower planes.

At the conclusion of any ritual fast or austerity it is a custom in Javanese occultism/shamanism to offer a thanks-giving consisting of yellow rice, glutinous-rice porridges, fruits, etc. The practitioner would invite friends and relatives to the feast.

Below are most of the methods of fasting and austerities as taught in Kejawen. We have intentionally left out the types of the left-handed path.:

Mutih

In this fast one may only eat white rice without anything else to go along with it. Not even salt or other condiments. Mutih is a tasteless meal. One may perhaps simply eat plain bread providing no salt has been added to the dough. In the mutih fast only plain mineral water is permissible to satisfy one's thirst. One may eat several times a day but with the stated conditions or once a day as perhaps designated in the magickal rite.

Ngeruh

In this fast one may only consume vegetarian meals. Meat is to be completely avoided. Fish, eggs, and animal products are not to be consumed in this fasting method. It is permissible to eat 3 times a day. This fast is actually the refraining from eating animal life-forms.

Ngebleng

This fast/austerity is a cessation of all normal activities. One may not eat, drink, get out of the house, or engage in sexual activities. Sleep should be minimized. One should preferably stay in one's room for the designated period--normally for 24 hours. During the twilight and night hours, the room should preferably be without physical illumination. The room itself should be dark. In this austerity it is permissible to visit the WC (located in other parts of the house), unlike the next difficult discipline.

Patigeni

Like the above, one may not eat, drink or engage in any sexual activities. In addition, one may not sleep, get out of the room, or have any physical illumination during night hours. One has to be in complete seclusion in a dark room. If one has the natural urge to discharge any waste in has to be done in the room--one with a bathroom attached to it would be a fitting place for this austerity. Depending on the requirements of the magickal rite, this austerity may run for a period of 24 hours, 3, 7 days, or more.

Ngelowong

This is a lighter form of the above two austerities. One may not eat or drink for the designated period. Three hours is the maximum sleep allowed. One may wander outside of the house.

Ngrowot

This is a complete fast from dawn to dusk. When one breaks the fast in the evening, one may only consume fruits--nothing else! This is a fruitarian discipline. It is permissible for one to eat as much as desired so long as they are of the same kind--bananas, for instance. The other harsh disciplines of the above such as seclusion, no sleep, do not apply in this austerity.

Nganyep

This is a fast from consuming anything that would cause a sensation in the tongue. In other words, the things that one eats or drinks should be tasteless. It is similar to mutih except that one has a more variety of foods to choose from: for instance, the tasteless diet biscuits . . .

Ngidang

Only edible leaves are eaten and plain water drunk in this austerity. Other foods and fluids are not allowed to be consumed.

Ngepel

Ngepel means "fist-full." In this fast, one eats a single meal a day and only a hand-full of rice is allowed or unless indicated by the requirements of the magickal ritual; two or three fist-full may be permitted. A very difficult fast as three days may be required to complete it.

Ngasrep

Only cold, tasteless foods and drinks are eaten and drunk in this fast--three times a day, if you will.

Monday-Thursday Fast

This fast is normally done at the conclusion of the other types of fasts. On Mondays and Thursdays one would refrain from eating and drinking from dawn to dusk. It is uncertain if this fast originates with Islam, as this religion also teaches it.

Wungon

This is a complete fast--the abstinence of food and drinks--for a period of 24 hours. One should also not sleep for that 24 hour period.

Other Austerities

Jejeg

No bending of the legs (i.e. no sitting) for 12 hours from dawn to dusk.

Lelana

Non-stop walking from midnight to 3 am. This is a time for introspection.

Kungkum

This is quite an interesting austerity. Many have found strange sensations occurring in their body as a result of this discipline. The method of Kungkum is thus: one has to submerge oneself naked in a sitting position up to the neck at the mouth of a river where two minor rivers meet. One has to face against the currents. The appropriate place and spot ought to be located before starting this austerity--the currents should not be too strong and the sand-bed flat. The environment should be quiet without other human beings lingering about. Commenced in the middle of the night, Kungkum is to be carried-out for the designated period by the magickal rite which may be 3 hours or more. Needless to say, this requires lots of practice. One must not fall asleep while doing the Kungkum as this would be perilous--one must not even move as this would defeat the purpose of the austerity. Before entering the river one

has to perform a ritual cleansing. While in the actual act of submerging into the water the following mantra ought to be recited:

"Putih-putihing mripatku Sayidina Kilir, Ireng-irenging mripatku Sunan Kali Jaga, Telenging mripatku Kanjeng Nabi Muhammad."

The eyes should be shut, and the hand crossed over the chest. The body's lower orifices also ought to be closed (perhaps one with a plug made out of cork) and the breathing regulated accordingly.

The Kungkum discipline is often carried-out for a period of 7 consecutive nights. It is especially useful in accumulating magickal force.

Ngalong

In this austerity one meditates with the feet up in the air with the head pointing downwards. The feet may be supported by a wall or one may do any related yoga asana for this. More advanced methods requires one to hang oneself upside down on tree branches, like bats. One should not attempt to sway or move while hanging thus. Physically, the constant exercise of this discipline helps the practitioner to develop the ability to control the breath--to refrain from breathing for hours at a time. This austerity is accompanied by the Ngrowot fasting method.

Ngeluwang/Nglowong

Ngeluwang is considered to be a frightening austerity that really tests one's courage. Various magickal powers are said to be acquired through the constant practice of Ngleluwang such as clairvoyance and the ability to making another see illusions. In Ngeluwang one has to place oneself in a large hole dug for the purpose, preferably in a graveyard or in a quiet place, and to remain there for the designated period--normally 24 hours. The basic biological needs of the body such as nourishment may be catered to. While carrying out this austerity one may face many temptations and frightening visions. Before entering the hole, the mantra below ought to be recited:

"Niat ingsun nglowong, anutupi badan kang bolong, sira mara sira mati, kang ganggu marang jiwa ingsun, lebur kaya dene banyu krana Allah Ta'ala."

From the descriptions of the types of fasting and austerities above, it can be seen that they are not easy to accomplish. The people of our contemporary times lack the fortitude as compared with the older generations; thus many do not possess the powers that their ancestors displayed.

Nowadays, with the materialistic orientation and life-style, people expect instant powers without too much effort. Although certain powers may be acquired through a transference of power, these are not the especially unique ones as applied and exhibited by the famed heroes of old, and may be temporary in nature depending upon the process used and personal potency of the channeler of the power. Perhaps we will provide examples of magickal rituals of occult-power acquisition that makes use of these shamanic fasting in future articles.

Since Kejawen or Javanese mysticism, and traditional shamanism have been influenced greatly by Islam, it would be most appropriate to complete this article by providing the types of fasting (called "saum" or "siyam" in Arabic. Lit. "self-control") as enjoined by this religion.

Basically, Islam categorizes two forms of fasting: obligatory and non-obligatory. The obligatory fast is part of the five-pillars of Islam, which is the mandatory fasting period in the month of Ramadan. Below we list the types of fasts:

The Ramadan Fast

This is the fast carried-out for the whole month of Ramadan. Islam does not encourage complete fasts such as taught in shamanism, thus there is food intake but within the hours designated. The Ramadan fast commences at dawn and ends at dusk--roughly 12 hours. Food and drinks may be consumed at any hour other than the 12-hour daylight period.

The Fast of King David

This non-obligatory fast is said to have its origin with the Hebrew King. Muhammad The Prophet, blessed is his name, is supposed to have said that among the non-obligatory fasts, the fast of King David is the best. This is recorded in the Bukhari and Muslim hadith, or recorded sayings of the Prophet. The method of the fast is similar to the one done in the month of Ramadan except that it is done every other day--fast one day, rest the next.

The Three-day Fast

This fast is done every month of the Arabic/Islamic calender for three consecutive days. The method is as the Ramadan fast. The best dates to commence this is on the 13th, 14th and 15th. This fast is non-obligatory.

The Six-day Fast

This fast is done for six days, preferably consecutive days in the month (Syawal) following Ramadan. Like the obligatory fast, no nourishment is taken from dawn to dusk. This is a non-obligatory fast like the above.

The Arafah-day Fast

To those who are not going on the pilgrimage to the Ka'ba, the Arafah-day fast is suggested for cleansing and the gaining of merit. It is done on the 9th day of the month of Zulhijah. This non-obligatory fast is supposed to wipe one's sins created within a two-year period--the year before the fast and the year after.

The Eighth-day Fast

Another single-day fast is the one done in the month of Zulhijah, just a day prior to the Arafah-day fast.

The Tasu'a and Asura Fast

This fast takes place on the 9th and 10th day of the month of Muharam.

The Al-Baidh (Full Moon) Fast

It is recorded that the Prophet enjoyed fasting in this period and encouraged others to do so. This is a three-day fast during the full moon.

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