

AUSTRALIA LOCAL PAGES

AREA LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

The Law of the Fast and Paying Generous Fast Offerings

By Elder Meliula M. Fata of the Seventy



Elder Meliula M. Fata

The law of the fast has been practiced since the beginning of time. The Saints have always fasted to help them draw near to God and to worship Him. In New Testament times, Jesus Christ fasted 40 days and 40 nights in preparation for His ministry (see Matthew 4:1–4). He taught His disciples about the power and importance of fasting. This commandment to fast continues in our day.

During the Saviour’s earthly ministry, a lawyer approached Him and asked, “Which is the great commandment in the law?”

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

“This is the first and great commandment.

“And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

“On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:36–40).

The Saviour’s response to the lawyer provides the basis of why we observe the law of the fast.

Caring for the poor and needy is one of four divinely appointed Church responsibilities that help individuals and families qualify for

exaltation. It is an aspect of both temporal and spiritual salvation.

“Our basic challenge is to teach our people to faithfully observe the law of the fast, and invite them to consecrate their fast by making a generous offering. . . . If the saints will do this, they will be greatly blessed and there will be sufficient amounts of money to care for the poor and the needy” (James E. Faust).

The blessings from being obedient to the law of the fast:

- Closeness to the Lord
- Increased spiritual strength
- Temporal well-being
- Greater compassion
- A stronger desire to serve (see *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* [2010], 6.1.2)
- Loose the bands of wickedness
- Undo the heavy burdens
- Let the oppressed go free
- Break every yoke
- Thine health shall spring forth speedily
- Thy righteousness shall go before thee
- Glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward
- When thou shalt cry, the Lord shall say, “Here I am”

- The Lord shall guide thee continually (see Isaiah 58:6–11)

One of the strongest admonitions the Lord has given to the members of the Church is that we have the responsibility and obligation of caring for the poor and the needy. King Benjamin said: “And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you—that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God—I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants” (Mosiah 4:26).

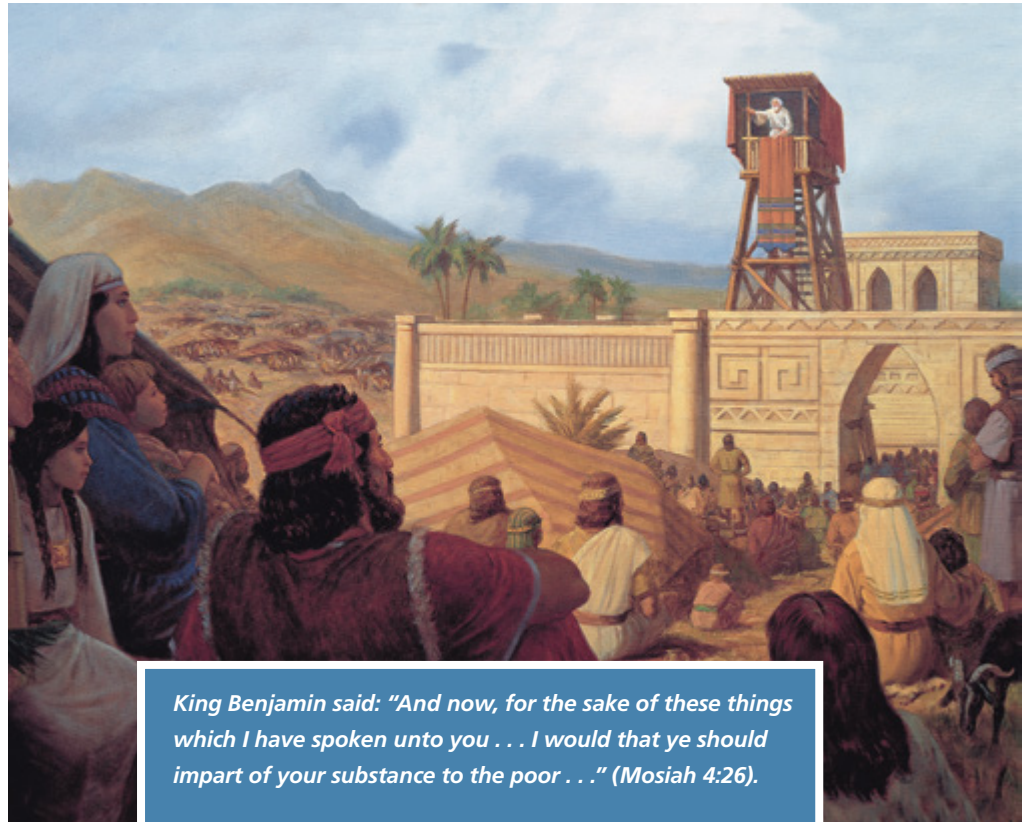
“For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare; yea, I prepared all things, and have given unto the children of men to be agents unto themselves.

“Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment” (D&C 104:17–18).

The Lord has established the law of the fast and fast offerings to bless his people and to provide a way for them to serve those in need (see Isaiah 58:6–12; Malachi 3:8–12). When members fast, they are asked to give to the Church a fast offering at least equal to the value of the food they would eat. If possible, they should be generous and give more. One Sabbath day each month is set aside for the purpose of fasting. Members of the Church go without food and water for two consecutive meals in a 24-hour period and then contribute the money that would have been spent for that food to the bishop to support those in need.

Fasting is a commandment from the Lord where we should humble ourselves before Him by voluntarily refraining from eating and drinking (see D&C 88:76). The law of the fast and paying generous fast offerings is a fundamental gospel doctrine and an essential element in the eternal plan of salvation. Prior to His mortal ministry, Jehovah declared, “For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land” (Deuteronomy 15:11).

Sister Arieta Lameko is a convert to the Church in Samoa. She was baptized in 1983 after she married a less-active member of the Church. She was very poor and lived in



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humble conditions. When she was first baptized, she was called to be a teacher in Relief Society, where she learnt about the law of the fast, fast offerings and tithing. Arieta would pay her tithing but not fast offering. As she continued to learn little by little about fast offerings, she started to pay a few cents as her fast offering. The more she understood the fast offering and its purpose, the more she increased the amount of her offering every month. Sister Lameko believes that her testimony of tithing, fasting and fast offerings has brought blessings to herself and family. She

is now self-reliant and supports a number of missionaries by contributing to the ward missionary fund. She has a grocery shop and operates two buses and a guesthouse to support her family. Now she considers herself a self-supported and self-reliant person. Her husband died a few years ago before he witnessed some of the blessings that she believes are a result of her commitment to living the law of the fast and offerings.

We can fast for many different purposes. Below are some of the different reasons that would help us make our fast more meaningful.

Overcome Weaknesses

We can overcome weaknesses or find solutions to our problems by fasting and praying. As we fast we petition the powers of heaven to strengthen us against the fiery darts of the adversary. Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin taught: “Without prayer, fasting is not complete fasting; it’s simply going hungry. If we want our fasting to be more than just going without eating, we must lift our hearts, our minds, and our voices in communion with our Heavenly Father. Fasting, coupled with mighty prayer, is powerful. It can fill our minds with the revelations of the Spirit. It can strengthen us against times of temptation” (“The Law of the Fast,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 73).

The Sick and Afflicted

We may wish to fast and pray for help and guidance for others, such as a family member who is ill and needs a blessing. After Alma the Younger was struck dumb by the angel, he was unable to speak or move. His father then gathered the priests for the purpose of fasting.

“And he caused that the priests should assemble themselves together; and they began to fast, and to pray to the Lord their God that he would open the mouth of Alma, that he might speak, and also that his limbs might receive their strength—that the eyes of the people might be opened

to see and know of the goodness and glory of God.

“And it came to pass after they had fasted and prayed for the space of two days and two nights, the limbs of Alma received their strength, and he stood up and began to speak unto them, bidding them to be of good comfort” (Mosiah 27:22–23).

Receive Revelation

Through fasting we can come to know the truth of things like the prophet Alma in the Book of Mormon. He said: “I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit” (Alma 5:46). Fasting creates an environment which invites the Holy Ghost to teach us truths and increase our understanding.

Comfort

Fasting can help comfort us in times of sorrow and mourning. After a tremendous battle between the Nephites and the Lamanites that resulted in the death of many Nephites, fasting became a means to seeking and receiving comfort.

“And now this was a time that there was a great mourning and lamentation heard throughout all the land, among all the people of Nephi—

“Yea, the cry of widows mourning for their husbands, and also of

fathers mourning for their sons, and the daughter for the brother, yea, the brother for the father; and thus the cry of mourning was heard among all of them, mourning for their kindred who had been slain.

“And now surely this was a sorrowful day; yea, a time of solemnity, and a time of much fasting and prayer” (Alma 28:4–6).

Draw Closer to Heavenly Father

Fasting can help us become humble and feel closer to our Heavenly Father.

“Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God” (Helaman 3:35).

Sister Kaloline Katieli was not able to attend church for twenty-five years because her nonmember husband had forbidden her from going to church with her children. She asked the deacons to come to her home every month to collect her fast offering and her tithing to give to the bishop. She did this without her husband’s knowledge. Later, the children started going to church, and when her eighteen-year-old daughter was called to be the Young Women president, she asked permission from her father if she could

accept the call, and her father became curious. On the Sunday she was sustained as Young Women president, he was very proud of his daughter, and that became the turning point of this man's life. He was later baptised. Sister Katieli later bore testimony of the power of the fast and fast offering. Her husband had turned his heart to her and the children. Their family was sealed in the temple, and two of the sons later served as bishops, while the rest continue to serve faithfully in their local areas. By observing the law of the fast, tithing and offerings, the

Katieli family were able to draw nearer to Heavenly Father.

Sharing the Gospel

Fasting is an invaluable tool in helping us share the gospel. You might have a friend that you are wanting to invite to church but are not sure how to approach it. Fasting can provide inspiration and courage to help you know what to say and do. It can also soften their hearts so they can be receptive to your invitation.

We learn from the missionary journeys of the sons of Mosiah that

they would often turn to fasting for guidance.

“And it came to pass that they journeyed many days in the wilderness, and they fasted much and prayed much that the Lord would grant unto them a portion of his Spirit to go with them, and abide with them, that they might be an instrument in the hands of God to bring, if it were possible, their brethren, the Lamanites, to the knowledge of the truth, to the knowledge of the baseness of the traditions of their fathers, which were not correct” (Alma 17:9).

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The prophet Alma admonished the Saints in Zarahemla to fast for those who were not members of the Church.

“Nevertheless the children of God were commanded that they should gather themselves together oft, and join in fasting and mighty prayer in behalf of the welfare of the souls of those who knew not God” (Alma 6:6).

Role of the Bishop

President Thomas S. Monson taught: “We must not overlook the vital role of the Aaronic Priesthood in caring for the poor and the needy. The bishop, as the president of the Aaronic Priesthood, holds the keys to direct welfare work in the ward. Those bishops who organize their Aaronic Priesthood quorums to participate in the collection of fast offerings will find increased success in this sacred responsibility” (in Presiding Bishopric meeting, Feb. 28, 2014).

“The office of a bishop is in administering all temporal things” (D&C 107:68). “The power and authority of the . . . Aaronic Priesthood, is to . . . administer in outward ordinances” (D&C 107:20). “And inasmuch as ye impart of your substance unto the poor, ye will do it unto me; and they shall be laid before the bishop of my church” (D&C 42:31).

While serving as a bishop in Auckland, New Zealand, I learned how important it was to teach our members



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to fast and pay generous fast offerings. We invited our ward council members and high priest group to donate what they could to support our ward families who needed help. Everyone gave unselfishly, because they had come to understand the principle behind giving, and many families in our ward received the necessary aid.

“And again Alma commanded that the people of the church should impart of their substance, every one according to that which he had; if he have more abundantly he should impart more abundantly; and of him that had but little, but little should be required; and to him that had not should be given” (Mosiah 18:27).

Conclusion

“Many are subject to weakness, others are delicate in health, and others have nursing babies; of such it should not be required to fast. Neither should parents compel their little children to fast” (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [1939], 244).

It is important that we take the advice of King Benjamin: “And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And again, it is expedient that he should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize; therefore, all things must be done in order” (Mosiah 4:27). ■

The Trek

By Sujatha Rice

Who would take 93 youth into the bush, equipped with 19th-century clothes, food and conveyances, with very little in the way of modern conveniences, and a plan to spend gruelling days pulling handcarts? And why would they do that?

The Adelaide Australia Marion Stake did just that, to acquaint the youth with their history, with one another, and with God.

It was an overcast morning at the meetinghouse at Cutting Road, Marion, when 150 youth and leaders met together, each wearing pioneer style dresses, aprons and bonnets or trousers, suspenders and neckerchiefs.

“Have a look around you,” said stake presidency leader Brett Wilmott. “The love and friendship that you feel for each other now will be magnified one hundredfold by the end of this experience. Those feelings will stay with you throughout your lives, and beyond.”

The excited group headed to Calperum Station, a huge property managed by the Australian Landscape Trust, which lies 15 kilometres north-west of Renmark, by bus. After disembarking, Marion Stake president Jason Ellis spoke to the group, encouraging them to make the most of their experience.



Adelaide Australia Marion Stake youth and leaders preparing to leave on their trek

Daylan Riddle was the company’s trail boss. He decided the pace to be set, what would be accomplished each day, and when they would break for camp each night. He organised the group into “families”—with experienced leaders as “ma and pa”, nine or ten youth as their children, and a “big brother” and “big sister” (young adult helpers) to assist. Each family included a life-sized doll “baby” to care for and carry along the way.

To help the youth really walk in the shoes of those early pioneers who had fled religious persecution in the eastern states of America, they walked hard, dragging the handcarts up and down sandy dunes, tackling twenty or more sandy hills.

The youth were exhausted when they stumbled into a clearing that first night around 1:00am, and ate a meagre supper before making camp. They slept on the ground, which didn’t seem as soft anymore.

At 6:00 am, they awoke, greeting their family members and sharing thoughts, feelings, and scriptural insights over breakfast. Then it was time to haul their weary bodies out again and continue their trek. It was hard, but the youth were learning something about themselves as they pulled together and encouraged one other through their exhaustion.

Along the way, the doll babies fell sick and “died”. Though the babies were not real, the actions of burial



**Adelaide Australia Marion Stake members
on the first day of the trek**

were real, and the feelings of the group were sombre and tender as they left their babies in the ground and continued on. Great compassion for the early Saints swelled in their hearts.

As they made camp that second day, a gentle rain began to fall. The leaders looked to the skies, and prayed that the weather would clear. One youth, however, turned to his ma and pa and said, “Perhaps instead of praying for the burden of rain to stop, we ought to pray that we are made strong enough to bear it.” This youth had internalised the scriptural story of the people of Alma, who prayed to have their physical burdens eased, and the Lord blessed them by strengthening their backs so they could bear their burdens.

The company leaders had done their best to create a learning experience for the youth those first two days, and then they felt that the Lord “took the reins”. That night as they lay in their very simple shelters, the heavens opened and the rain poured down. One poor family’s shelter could not withstand the weather, and the family was drenched, spending a very uncomfortable night.

In the morning, it was still raining, and the ground had turned to mud. The families were instructed to leave as much behind as they could—they needed to lighten the load on the carts so they could pull them through the quagmires. By mid-morning every shoe was soaked, and every leg

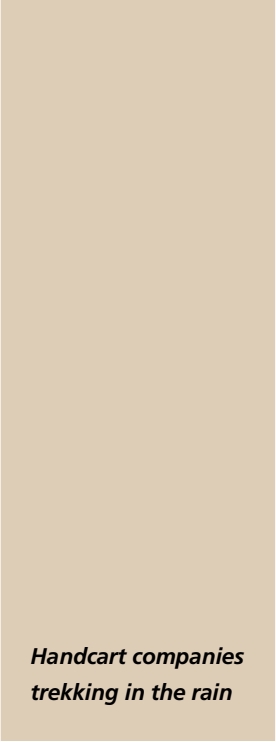
mud-spattered, as the youth and their leaders waded through calf-deep mud.

Their souls were stretched, but once again their hearts rose to meet the challenge. The rain, the mud, the physical and mental toil were taking their toll. Words of encouragement were the only currency they had to share. By mid-afternoon, it became clear that one of the most famous pioneer stories, a story well known to the youth, needed to be re-enacted. The rescue!

Preparation for the trek had started 12 months previously, and this eventuality had been planned for—it was time to put the rescue to action. Unlike in the 1856 historic rescue of stranded, starving, snow-bound handcart pioneers, this time the rescuers came in 4WD vehicles!

They picked up the weary youth and took them back to Calperum Station. That night the company took shelter in the relative luxury of a woolshed. They felt gratitude in their hearts for their rescuers, and it turned their hearts to Jesus Christ, from whom they could find eternal shelter from all sorrow and toil.

Saturday morning brought reflection time. All the youth were given letters from their parents and were encouraged to find a quiet place to read them, ponder their experience, write in their journals, and to think about what they wanted from their lives and how they could accomplish it.



Handcart companies trekking in the rain

Kirra Pope, 16, of the Onkaparinga ward said, “All in all, the experience brought a lot of light into people’s lives, as they discovered the limits their bodies could be pushed to and beyond that! Remembering the Saints who trekked through snowstorms and harsh terrain for months on end humbled our hearts, as we learnt how to live without the security of our material luxuries we have grown so close to.”

The inaugural pioneer trek of the Marion Stake was a success! Its purpose had taken root in the hearts of the youth, and they saw in one another glimpses of the trees those roots could become in the years and decades ahead. ■



Nearing the end of the trek—time for the rescue party