

Fasting and Study

The most common thing that young people do in Western societies is study. In America, kids may study for twelve, sixteen, eighteen, twenty, or even more years. Is study compatible with fasting? Absolutely! But some adjustments to the fasting rule may be made, both due to age and also to the task of studying. It is well-researched and documented for example, that breakfast is important for school performance. There is a simple explanation: if you eat supper at seven or eight o'clock in the evening, then by seven or eight in the morning you will have been fasting for twelve hours. If you do not break fast, then by lunch time, you will have been fasting for sixteen hours—this is when catabolic processes already begin. When the body does not receive fuel in the form of good complex carbs, it begins to slow its metabolism and shut down non-essential functions—one feels tired, sleepy, sluggish, and cannot think well or quickly, because the brain actually consumes approximately 20% of the total calorie intake. In other words, school children should not follow the monastic rule of eating once a day after vespers—at least, not for any significant length of time. Also, as I mentioned before, some prominent seminaries and theological academies serve fish during Great Lent. If future priests and their instructors, many of whom are monastics, feel that they need fish because they study or teach, I believe that other students may benefit from the same. It certainly does not have to be a fancy lobster dinner, but if one feels that one may need a can of tuna on a “non-fish” day, this may be an acceptable practice. It may also be the case that children are served lunch at school. It is difficult to observe all of the fasting rules when they have no control over what goes into their food. For example, they may be given a salad with some cheese or dressing that has dairy. In my view, it is better to thank God and to eat this salad than to go hungry or eat a bag of potato chips, which may be perfectly fasting from a legalistic point, but are certainly not healthy if a child is compelled to choose chips over salad for forty-nine days. Children can still abstain from meat even in school, and they can observe as strict a fast as they wish when they eat breakfast and supper at home. But it may be inevitable to make some allowances for school lunches and even better to pack one's own lunch.