
It is almost February, which means that Mardi Gras is just around the corner! After all the Mardi Gras festivities, the season of Lent will begin, and many around the world will adjust their normal diet for religious reasons. During the season of Lent, Christians, specifically, Catholics, give up a certain food or practice fasting. Fasting is often associated with the season of Lent for Christians or the season of Ramadan for Muslims; however, many other cultures and religions around the world fast throughout the year. While the duration, practice, and specific reasons differ, all fasts have the similar goals of showing sacrifice and cleansing oneself.

Religions and philosophies that practice fasting include: Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Taoism, Jainism, and Hinduism. Fasting can last for just a few hours or even a few weeks, usually with practitioners eating at night. Interestingly, even within a religion, different denominations or sects may fast differently or at different times. For example, within Christianity, there are several different denominations that fast at different times. Catholics do not eat meat on Fridays during Lent, while Coptic Christians, the main form of Christianity in Egypt, fast for different durations for a total of 210 days throughout the year. They have eight main fasts, and each lasts for a different duration and restricts the diet in a unique way.

Some cultures even fast for non-religious reasons. The town of Geneva, Switzerland, holds the “Jeune genevois” or “Fast of Geneva,” which is a public holiday and day of fasting in the canton of Geneva occurring in September. The holiday originated in the Middle Ages when some days were officially decided to be fasting days as penitence after calamities such as wars, epidemics, or the plague.

Fasting has been around for centuries and will continue to be a regular practice for many cultures in the future. Remember to be culturally sensitive to those that are fasting to prevent your actions from making their practice more difficult. Try and refrain from eating or drinking in front of someone who is partaking in a fast.

¹ Taken from <https://culturalawareness.com/fasting-around-the-world/#:~:text=Religions%20and%20philosophies%20that%20practice,with%20practitioners%20eating%20at%20night.&text=Some%20cultures%20even%20fast%20for%20non%2Dreligious%20reasons>.

1. Drag and drop the headings to the corresponding paragraph:

Fast is not exclusively for religious purposes

Fasting is taking place into the Catholics

Fasting as a common practice that will remain in different cultures

Not only the Catholics and the Muslims fast

2. Indicate if the following statements are true or false.

- a. Not only the Christians and Muslims but also other religions fast. True False
- b. The meaning of fast is to stop gaining weight. True False
- c. The people who practice fast usually do not eat during months. True False
- d. There are some communities that fast for non-religious purposes True False

3. Read the text again and select the correct answer based on it.

- a. The objective of fasting is to:

Show sacrifice and cleanse oneself
Show respect to the others
Celebrate Mardi Gras
Save money for other purposes

- b. In Switzerland, the Fast of Geneva:

Has a religious purpose
Occurs in August
Is a recent event
Is celebrated because of wars and other calamities

- c. If you see that someone is fasting in front of you, you:

Eat in front of him
Avoid eating in front of him
Invite him to eat with you
Ask him why he is fasting