

# High Feasts & Holy Days

Lesson 5: Lent

3.5.2017

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**Objectives:** Explore Lent and fasting as a spiritual practice.

**Materials:** flipchart, basket of cards, pretzels, purple ribbons, lesson attachments.

**Time allotments** suggested and meant to be adapted for **75 minute class**.

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## 1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
  - ▶ How long could you go without your cellphone? Facebook? Video games? TV?
  - ▶ What is something challenging and important enough for which you have trained and disciplined yourself?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

## 2. Silly Fun: Would You Rather...? (5 minutes max)

In the classroom, there will be a selection of cards with questions “Would You Rather...?” Read a few questions aloud and ask the youth to physically move themselves to designated places in the room based on their answers (so standing vote). Give each cluster a few minutes to chatter about their reasons.

Example: “*Would you rather be confined to your room for one year OR go wherever you want but always have to wear a giraffe costume?*”

## 3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: “We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”

Teacher reads: (from C.S. Lewis, author of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*)

“*The only things we can keep are the things we freely give...*”

## 4. Joys and Sorrows (10 minutes): Listening is a precious gift that we offer one another at church. Using the balance scale and the blue (sorrows) and yellow (joys) stones, invite youth to share a joy and/or a sorrow from the past week, as a way of meeting one another with our lives and sharing in community. You will want to set limits (e.g. two stones max per person) so that no one monopolizes sharing time.

Each Sunday, a copy of the congregation's Embracing Meditation will be made available to your class, so that stones can be put in for those whose names are being spoken in the Sanctuary.

**5. The Number 40 in Abrahamic traditions: (15 minutes)**

**Teacher summarizes:** Lent is a period that lasts (about) 40 days, starting on Ash Wednesday (March 1, 2017) when the priest or minister marks the foreheads of the faithful with ashes and reminds them of their mortality and need to repent from their sins. Lent is a period of fasting, prayer, and reflection, concluding on the eve of Easter (most Protestant denominations) or Maundy Thursday of Holy Week (Roman Catholic). The length of 40 days is not random, as the number 40 is significant in Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and other Middle Eastern traditions (often conveying a sense of complete, life cycle of a generation or time).

**Pass out attached slips of paper, each with a #40 fact. Ask each youth to read one or two:**

**In Judaism:**

- Rain fell for “forty days and forty nights” during the flood of Noah.
- Hebrew spies explored the land of Israel for “forty days.” (Numbers 13)
- The Hebrew people lived in the Sinai desert for “forty years.” This period represents the time it takes for a new generation to arise.
- In the Hebrew scriptures, it rained for 40 days and 40 nights in the great flood, in which all land living beings perished except those on Noah's ark.
- Moses' life is divided into three 40-year segments, separated by his fleeing from Egypt, and his return to lead his people out.
- Several Jewish leaders and kings are said to have ruled for “forty years,” a generation. (Examples: Eli, Saul, David, Solomon.)
- Goliath challenged the Israelites twice a day for “forty days” before David defeated him.
- Moses spent three consecutive periods of “forty days and forty nights” on Mount Sinai.
- The Jewish *mikvah* ritual bath is filled with 40 se'ah (approximately 200 gallons) of water.
- One of the prerequisites for a man to study the Jewish mystical teachings, called *Kabbalah*, is that he is forty years of age.

### **In Christianity:**

- Before the temptation of Christ, Jesus fasted “forty days and forty nights” in the Judean desert.
- Forty days was the period from the resurrection of Jesus to the ascension of Jesus into heaven.
- In modern Christian practice, Lent consists of the 40 days preceding Easter. In much of Western Christianity, Sundays are excluded from the count; in Eastern Christianity, Sundays are included.

### **In Islam:**

- Muhammad was forty years old when he first received the revelation delivered by the archangel Gabriel.
- The Quran, the central religious book of Islam, says that a person is only fully grown when they reach the age of 40.
- Prophet Ibrahim spent 40 days in a fire and lived because Allah made the fire like flowers.
- In Islam, the Prophet Yunus (“Jonah” in Judaism) was in a whale’s belly for 40 days.
- Muhammad was praying and fasting in the cave for 40 days.
- Muhammad then had 40 followers to spread the religion of Islam.
- In Islam, It is believed that one who assists a blind man for forty steps becomes worthy of entering heaven.
- The great Imam Muhammed al-Baqir (676-733 CE ) said, “The prayers of someone who drinks wine are not accepted for forty days.”
- In Islam, mourning period officially lasts for 40 days.

### **6. Have some Pretzels: (15 minutes)**

**Teacher summarizes:** Within the Roman Catholic Church, pretzels were regarded as having religious significance for both its ingredients and shape. Pretzels made with a simple recipe using only flour and water could be eaten during Lent, when Christians were forbidden to eat eggs, lard, or dairy products such as milk and butter. *Mardi Gras* (French for “Fat Tuesday”) is the festive carnival period that culminates on the day before Lent begins, when everyone used up their last stores of forbidden foods so that they wouldn’t spoil; hence all the donuts/cakes/pastries/fried things on *Fat Tuesday*.)



**While enjoying eating pretzels,** have youth volunteers take turns reading paragraphs aloud from the attached handout on the history of pretzels.

## 7. Lenten sacrifices: Filet O'Fish 2 for \$5! (15 minutes)

**Teacher summarizes:** Ever noticed that some McDonald's have specials on Filet O'Fish sandwiches in February and March? This is because many Catholics give up meat during Lent but still eat fish. During Lent, Christians make a variety of pledges to "go without" depending on which tradition they follow. In earlier centuries, the fasting and abstinence was severe: no animal products at all, only one meal a day (usually after 3 pm or sunset), and no alcohol.

Today, most Catholics do not eat meat on Ash Wednesday or on Fridays throughout Lent. Some give it up altogether. Many modern Protestants give up something that they really enjoy. They consider the observation of Lent to be a choice, rather than an obligation. They may decide to give up a favorite food or drink (e.g. chocolate, sweets, alcohol) or activity (e.g. going to the movies, playing video games, etc.), or they may instead take on a Lenten spiritual discipline such as devotions, volunteering, and so on.

### Questions for Discussion:

Lenten sacrifices take a lot of discipline (where we also get the word "disciple" and its root meaning of learning/following). Even if we may not be Christian, we can still appreciate the role of discipline in spiritual life, especially with fasting that remains a spiritual practice for many religions.

- What's the difference between fasting and dieting?
- What distinguishes fasting from simply being a form of self-denial and even self-harm from being a practice of self-discipline and even self-transcendence?
- How can fasting or other forms of sacrifice help us to grow spiritually? Ethically? Relationally? Environmentally conscious?
- What forms of collective fasting may be important for our life in the world today?
- Fasting from something often entails taking up something (e.g. fasting from wasting food may mean consuming more mindfully, more attentive to portion size.) What are some other examples of "giving up" that actually entail "taking up" something?

## 8. Lenten Spiritual Discipline: (10 minutes)

Ask each youth – and teachers, too – to make a Lenten pledge. What's something they would be willing to either "give up" or "take up" for 40 days of Lent (from March 1 until Easter on April 16<sup>th</sup>):

There may be silly and flip answers at first, but help youth to think realistically and seriously about what might serve as a spiritual practice:

- Giving up 30 minutes/day of favorite entertainment?
- Giving up 10% of weekly allowance, or other money, to contribute towards a cause?

- Giving up a favorite “treasured item” by letting another (sibling, friend?) borrow and enjoy it during Lent?
- Giving up an hour of free time for volunteer/service work?
- Taking up a specific house chore, or offering a kind word to someone each day?
- Taking up 10 minutes each day for quiet reflection or journaling?
- Taking up a “random act of kindness” every day during Lent?
- Taking up the practice of listening to another person more than talking about your own concerns?

**\*Note:** Be creative and realistic! Find something that’s do-able, even if it’s just pausing and taking deep breaths for 1 minute each day.

**\*Note:** Should be something youth can talk about (not private and confidential), as they will be encouraged to check in on Sundays and see how they’re each doing.

**Write out a pledge** (attached), roll it up, tie it with a purple ribbon (purple is the color of Lent, just as red and green are the colors of Christmas), and pin it on the corkboard as weekly reminder. Check in with each other on Sundays to see how it’s going.

**9. Say goodbye until next time:** Extinguish the chalice, saying together:

*“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”*

**10. Help clean up classroom** before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- return blue/yellow stones to containers
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets