

## Religious, Cultural & Ethnic Holidays & Days of Observance

### March 2019

This handout is to call your attention to just some of the many nationally and internationally recognized and/or celebrated diverse days of observance and religious/ethnic holidays that fall within the month of March 2019. We invite you to share it with the students, staff, and faculty you work with across campus. For more information, feel free to visit the Multicultural Resource Calendar located on the Office of Student Life's Mosaic Center website:

[http://www.diversityresources.com/aa\\_gsr/index.php?key=adCaO2Shix6u](http://www.diversityresources.com/aa_gsr/index.php?key=adCaO2Shix6u)

Thank you,

The Mosaic: Center for Culture and Diversity, Interfaith Center, and Queer Student Lounge Staff

#### **March 2- Baha'i : Baha'i Fast (3/2-3/20)**

The last month in the Baha'i calendar is dedicated to the Baha'i Fast. For nineteen days each year from March 2 to March 20 Baha'is refrain from eating or drinking from sunrise to sunset. This is a time for reflection on one's spiritual progress. Those exempt from fasting include the ill, pregnant or nursing women, and people under 15 or over 70 years old.

#### **March 4- Christian : Shrove Monday**

Christians in some countries customarily make treats to use up butter and eggs before the 40-day fast of Lent.

#### **March 5- Hindu : Maha Shivaratri (Shiva's Night)**

This festival honors Shiva who, along with Vishnu and Krishna, is one of the most important deities in Hinduism. It is observed in the spring and is celebrated with fasting, prayer, and meditation.

#### **March 5- Christian : Shrove Tuesday (Mardi Gras)**

Shrove Tuesday marks the final midwinter fling before Lent begins.

#### **March 6- Christian : Ash Wednesday (beginning of Lent)**

This marks the beginning of Lent, a 40-day period of prayer and fasting preceding Easter Sunday. It is observed in memory of Jesus' 40 days of fasting in the desert. In the early centuries of Christianity, there were strict requirements for fasting during the period of preparation for Easter. Although these rules have been relaxed in the Western church, many Roman Catholics and Protestants choose to give up a favorite food or activity during Lent. There are many symbolic meanings to the use of ashes on this holiday. Generally, ashes symbolize death. The priest or minister's placing of ashes on one's forehead in the shape of a cross is part of the preparation for fasting and resistance to temptation by those observing Lent that ends in the

symbolic renewal of life on Easter. The word Lent comes from Middle English *lenten* or *lente*, from the Old English *lencten* or *lengten*, meaning spring—the time of year when the days begin to lengthen.

### **March 11- Eastern Orthodox Christian : Beginning of Great Lent**

Also known as Clean Monday in Greece and Green Monday in Cyprus, this begins the Lenten season based on the Julian calendar followed by Eastern Orthodox Christians. Eastern Orthodox Lent, known as Great Lent, includes Sundays and officially ends on Lazarus Saturday, the day before Palm Sunday, although fasting continues during Holy Week. While many people no longer fast for forty days, most people observe the fast strictly for the two weeks preceding Easter. In Greece, a carnival season called *apokria* precedes the start of Lent. *Apokria* begins with a feast of roast kid or lamb, followed by two weeks of festivities including parades of masked figures. The third week begins with *Tyrini*—Cheese Sunday—when cheese, a food forbidden during Lent, is eaten in pies. The following day is Clean Monday, and is a national holiday when many children appear in their Carnival costumes. The pastime of the day is flying special hexagonal kites decorated with geometric designs. Traditionally, all animal foods including fish are forbidden during Lent and some people also eschew oil. Vegetables and legumes are therefore the main Lenten foods of Greece, with a little shellfish—permitted because, unlike fin fish, it lacks blood. This day is a national holiday in Greece and Cyprus.

### **March 19- Roman Catholic : Feast of St. Joseph**

This feast day honors St. Joseph, the husband of Mary. The celebration is especially important in Italy, because during the Middle Ages when Sicily was plagued with a horrible drought, St. Joseph (*San Giuseppe*) answered the people's prayers to him by ending the drought. A giant feast was held to honor *San Giuseppe*, a tradition that continues to this day. On the eve of March 19, bonfires are lit in the streets. The next day, an elderly carpenter is chosen to act the part of *San Giuseppe*, while a poor girl is chosen to play the part of Mary, and a young orphan boy plays the infant Jesus. A midday mass is held, followed by an outdoor banquet where *crespoli di riso* (rice made into sausages and fried in honey) and *sfinci* (cream-puff fritters with ricotta filling) are eaten. After the banquet, the Holy Family mounts richly adorned mules and leads a procession while being showered with gifts. The feast became widespread in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and in 1621 Pope Gregory XV made the Feast of St. Joseph a holy day of obligation.

### **March 20- Pagan and Wiccan : Ostara begins at sundown**

### **March 20- Jewish : Purim begins at sundown**

**March 20- Baha'i : Naw Ruz (New Year) begins at sundown**

This marks the end of the Baha'i Fast and the beginning of the Baha'i New Year.

**March 21- Jewish : Purim (Feast of Lots)**

This festive holiday celebrates the rescue of the ancient Persian Jews from a plot to destroy them. The king's advisor, Haman, cast lots to choose the day for carrying out his plan. Esther, the Jewish queen, persuaded her husband to spare the Jews. Fasting on the day before Purim commemorates Esther's fasting before seeing the king to plead for the Jewish people. The "Megillah," the story of Purim, is read in the synagogue. Children twirl gragers (noisemakers) to drown out Haman's name each time it is mentioned. Homentashen, special pastries in the form of Haman's hat, are eaten. Gifts are distributed to the poor as well as exchanged among family and friends.

**March 21- Zoroastrian : Naw Ruz (New Year)**

Celebrated at the time of the vernal equinox, this is the beginning of the Zoroastrian new year according to the Fasli seasonal calendar. The most elaborate of the Gahambars, or feasts of obligation, observed during the Zoroastrian year, Naw Ruz celebrates Ahura Mazda, the Lord of Wisdom, and the holy fire symbolic of His divine light. The sixth day of Naw Ruz, called the Great Naw Ruz, is the most important day of celebration, since it is believed to be the birthday of the Zoroastrian prophet Zarathushtra. Patterned after the Gregorian calendar, the Fasli calendar keeps in harmony with the seasons by intercalculating one day every four years, with the date of Naw Ruz being fixed on March 21. According to the Shenshai, or Shahanshahi, calendar followed by Parsi Zoroastrians, Naw Ruz is observed on a different date. (See entry for Birthday of Prophet Zarathushtra.)

**March 21- Sikh : Hola Mohalla**

This is a three-day Sikh festival celebrated in Anandpur Sahib in the Indian state of Punjab. Hola Mohalla, literally "mock fight," is a display of martial arts and military exercises, including mock battles, sword fighting, archery, and maneuvers on speeding horses, followed by music, dance, and poetry competitions. It was introduced by Guru Gobind Singh Ji in 1701 as a way to strengthen the martial arts in the Sikh community.

**March 21- Hindu : Holi**

Holi, the festival of colors, celebrates the coming of spring throughout India and the new harvest of the winter crop. It is celebrated over two days, Holi and Dhuleti, also known as chhoti holi and badi holi. Celebrations begin on the full moon night of the Hindu month of Phalgun, when large bonfires are lit to cleanse the air of evil spirits and to symbolize the destruction of Holika,

for whom the festival is named. Newly harvested grains, coconuts, and sweets are thrown into the fire as offerings, followed by singing and dancing around the bonfire. When the fire dies down, water is splashed on the embers, and everyone applies the ash to their forehead. Some of the ash is kept in the home to apply to children's foreheads to protect them against evil throughout the year. The following day is the festival of colors, a riotous and exuberant celebration of throwing colored powder, or gulal, on friends and spraying them with colored water, playing games, folk dancing, singing, feasting, and general merrymaking.

**March 21- Pagan and Wiccan : Ostara (Vernal Equinox)**

This is the Sabbat observed on the vernal equinox.

**March 25- Christian : The Annunciation**

Based on the gospel in Luke 1:26–56, this holy day celebrates the Angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary of Galilee that she would become the mother of Jesus.

**March 26- Zoroastrian : Birthday of Prophet Zarathushtra (Khordad Sal)**

This holiday, known as the Great Naw Ruz, celebrates the birth of the Persian prophet Zarathushtra, who founded Zoroastrianism. Known in Greece as Zoroaster, Zarathushtra is believed by scholars to have lived sometime between 1400 and 1000 B.C., although the Zoroastrian tradition teaches that he lived between the early 600s and the mid-500s B.C. Zoroastrianism originated in the Russian Steppes of Central Asia, along the northern border of the Persian Empire near the Aral Sea.