

Canary Wharf
Multifaith Chaplaincy



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In conversation with the Chaplaincy

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WELCOME

from this issue's editors:
Fiona Stewart-Darling and
Ibrahim Mogra

INSIDE

A new look for our
newsletter

Canary Wharf Multifaith
Chaplaincy is 20 this
year, Fiona Stewart-
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Lunar New Year

In this issue the
Chaplaincy team and our
guest writers look at
fasting in our multifaith
communities



The Lunar New Year is celebrated on 10th February,
when we will welcome the arrival of the year of the
dragon. **Tang Oscar** explains more inside.

CHAT WITH A CHAPLAIN - 020 7 477 1073

We are always available, face-to-face, by phone or online



Announcement

A new look for our newsletter

To celebrate our 20th anniversary, we have been working with The Comms Crowd, who are helping us with both design and writing skills, to create a new look to our newsletter. From now on, the newsletter will be bimonthly. We hope you will continue to enjoy it and also share it widely. We would love to hear what you think, [email us](#)

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Are you planning a faith celebration at Canary Wharf?
[Tell us](#) what you are up to as we would be delighted to feature your story.

Introduction

Canary Wharf Multifaith Chaplaincy is 20 this year – Fiona Stewart-Darling reflects

Canary Wharf is home to 150 companies employing over 120,000 people, around 4,000 residents and over 360 retail outlets, as well as a large and changing contingency of construction workers. The Chaplaincy comprises six Chaplains including me, two volunteer retail Chaplains, and an office manager. [You can see us here.](#)

In the 20 years since I set the Chaplaincy up, the core of what we do has been constant. Our aim is to provide pastoral care to all, and to support people of all faiths and no faith.

This birthday year presents us with an opportunity for reflection and growth. We will examine our strategy, thinking about how we can be even more creative in our work, continue to help companies integrate faith into their wellbeing strategies, and focus on the core tenets of enjoyment, fun and caring for each other.

We are often asked around the time of Ramadan whether other religions have a tradition of fasting. So this newsletter includes articles and reflections from different faiths on fasting. When we were commissioning the articles, I discovered that within Sikhism there is no tradition of fasting, hence no Sikh contribution on fasting. Chinese New Year is in February so we also have a personal reflection on how that will be celebrated.

Celebration

Lunar New Year

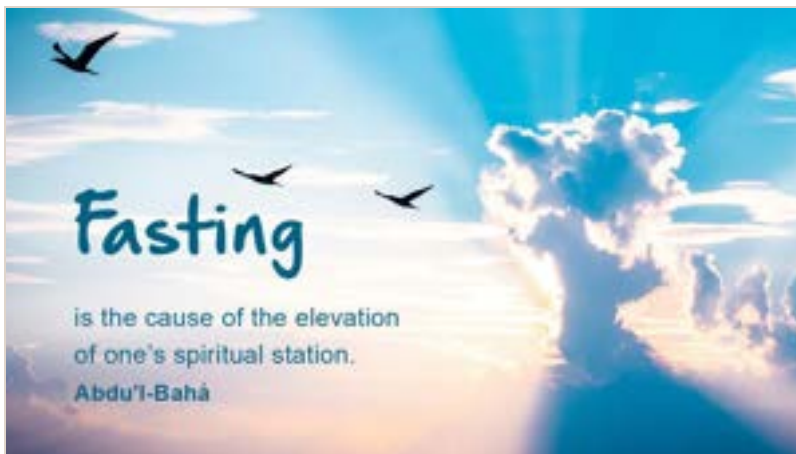
Lunar New Year begins with the first new moon of the traditional Chinese calendar and in 2024 begins on 10 February, writes **Tang Oscar**, Senior Associate Tech/Digital at Clifford Chance. On New Year Eve families gather for a reunion dinner, triggering the largest annual human migration event in the world, with an estimated 300 million travellers within China alone making their way home.

Lunar New Year is pagan, its origins lost to history and myth, with a range of celebrations taking place over a 15-day period to mark a moon cycle.

There is a common theme of reunion. We visit family, exchange gifts, and make offerings to ancestors. It is not so different from trips to Ireland with my partner for Christmas, or the lighting of votive candles in church. Though the two-hour train journey from London Euston up north, where my parents now live, is a much more muted affair on a cold winter evening before Lunar New Year than during a pre-holiday rush.

This is a year of the dragon, an auspicious and favoured year for parents to have children. Beijing is reportedly counting on it to (temporarily) reverse China's population decline. It is also a year of new beginnings for me, as I am newly married. Perhaps this year my parents will make the trip down. I trust they will excuse my partner's Irish palate, though I might not go so far as to make a spice bag.





Faith festivals

Bahá'í fast

The Bahá'í faith observes a fasting period that lasts 19 days. The period coincides with the month leading up to Naw-Rúz – the Bahá'í New Year – which aligns with the Spring Equinox. During this sacred month, Bahá'ís globally practice fasting by refraining from food and beverages from sunrise to sunset, writes **Fiona Stewart-Darling**.

Since the inception of the Bahá'í Faith in the early 19th Century, followers have adhered to this fasting practice as instructed by Baha'u'llah, the prophet-founder of the religion. The fast is deeply symbolic for Bahá'ís. It represents detachment from material existence and fosters a sense of empathy towards those who are less fortunate, while facilitating spiritual growth and development.

The teachings of the Bahá'í faith highlight the profound spiritual gains of fasting. Each year, this special 19-day period is dedicated to enhanced prayer, meditation, and introspection within the Bahá'í community. The practice of fasting serves as a vital pause for Bahá'ís to allow revitalisation of the soul, create space for deep reflection, and provide an opportunity to strengthen spiritual resolve.

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For more information about Bahá'í Faith, you can visit BahaiTeachings.org – Personal perspectives inspired by Bahá'í teachings.

Bahá'í fast will take place on the evening of Friday, 1 March – Wednesday, 20 March 2024



Faith festivals

Fasting as a practice in the Buddhist tradition

Buddhism emphasises the Middle Way. This is a path of moderation, restraint and balance, which avoids both extreme asceticism and unrestrained indulgence, as they may hinder rather than support the path that leads to the way out of suffering, explains **Mariano Marcigaglia**.

Practitioners within various traditions may choose to incorporate fasting or dietary restrictions as a personal practice.

In the early eighties, as a young trainee I would be instructed by my teacher, a compassionately fierce Zen nun, on how to lead my daily life, giving it a structure, guarding the senses including the mind, meeting circumstances with an open and vulnerable heart, restraining emotional reactions, and letting go, coming back to the body. Simple in a way, but tough in another, little room for Mariano to hide.

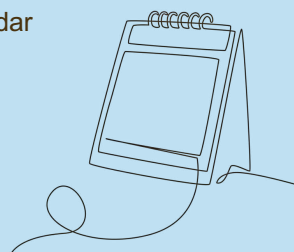
My teacher would recommend taking a day off the practice once a week, and a week or two once or twice a year, in order to let some steam off. Many years later, it has become apparent to me that the real vacation is actually the practice itself. In laying me down and in being of service to all that is, there is ease and joy.

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The Buddhist community in Canary Wharf are one of the regular users of the Multifaith prayer room. [Check here](#) to see what's on.

Celebrating faith in the Wharf

For the 2023/2024 Faith Festivals Calendar [follow the link](#)

Activities in the Canary Wharf Multifaith prayer Room [check here](#)





Faith festivals

Fasting in Hinduism

Known in Sanskrit as *upavasa*, fasting is a key cultural practise in Hinduism. Where *upa* means near and *vasa* means to stay the word indicates that fasting aims to keep God close to your heart and mind, writes **Suri Shandilya**, Managing Director, HSBC.

Many suffice with only coconut water, and sleep on the ground. These types of fasts are common for Hindus since in some form or another, austerity is a precursor for participating in ceremonies, also known as *puja*. The level of austerities fluctuates. For example, fasts related to *samskara* (rites of passage) such as weddings require a simplistic fast where families of the couple refrain from food until completion of the ceremony.

Fasting aims to function as a ritualistic purifier, where the mind and senses are prepared to perform sacred rituals, and provide the individual with the necessary merits to hear or chant sacred mantras from the Vedic scriptures associated with the activity.

Where there is no specific purpose, the almanac assigns two days a month for adherents to fast. Known as *ekadashi*, the eleventh waning and waxing lunar day provides the opportunity to move our focus to spiritual advancement by minimising bodily needs. This provides the benefit of intermittent fasting which results in advantageous health impacts.

Fasting has the dual impact of spiritual and material benefit since a healthy body, houses a healthy soul.



Faith festivals

Fast in the Christian faith

Fasting has always been part of the discipline of the Christian faith, and we take our lead from Jesus himself, explains **Revd Sr Judith Blackburn SSM**.

The gospel of Matthew relates how Jesus, following his baptism and God's affirmation of him as his beloved Son, goes into the desert where he fasts and prays for forty days and forty nights. During this time Jesus is tempted by the "devil" to exercise his power and the first temptation is to turn stones into bread to eat. Jesus responds, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

This was a time of preparation for Jesus. It allowed Jesus to draw closer to his heavenly Father, and gain some clarity on what he was being called to do, and how to do it.

Such self-denial is a reordering of the self. We are no longer at the mercy of our unhealthy appetites and can be liberated from our compulsions so that we can offer our true selves to God and be open to God.

I find these times valuable as an opportunity to re-orientate my life and spiritual practices – self-reflection, repentance, prayer, fasting and studying holy scripture. Fasting on its own could be virtue signalling, but being part of this balanced spiritual diet keeps it grounded, and the self-denial keeps the prayer honest.

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Our Christian Chaplains offer a weekly Biblical Reflection. Subscribe for free [here](#).



Faith festivals

Fasting as an Orthodox Jew

I look at fasting through the lens of how it is described in the Yom Kippur prayer, where there are three elements that are needed by an individual to alleviate an evil decree, writes **Lisa Farkovits**, Global Head of Model Risk Management, Barclays. These are Teshuvah (widely translated as repentance), prayer and giving to charity (the last of which is done on the eve of the Yom Kippur holiday).

It is widely understood in the Jewish faith that part of Teshuva is achieved through fasting. Teshuva for me is about trying to achieve a greater level of spirituality, and throwing off the yoke of our human needs to allow us to focus on our spirituality.

When I am fasting, I may be focusing a bit on my hunger, particularly later in the day, but I am not thinking of rushing to complete my prayers so I can get to a meal and satisfy my physical hunger and my need for social interaction. While I fast I am more focused on achieving my spiritual objective, which is praying with as much focus and concentration as I am capable of so that I can make the day and my return to a focus on faith as meaningful as possible.

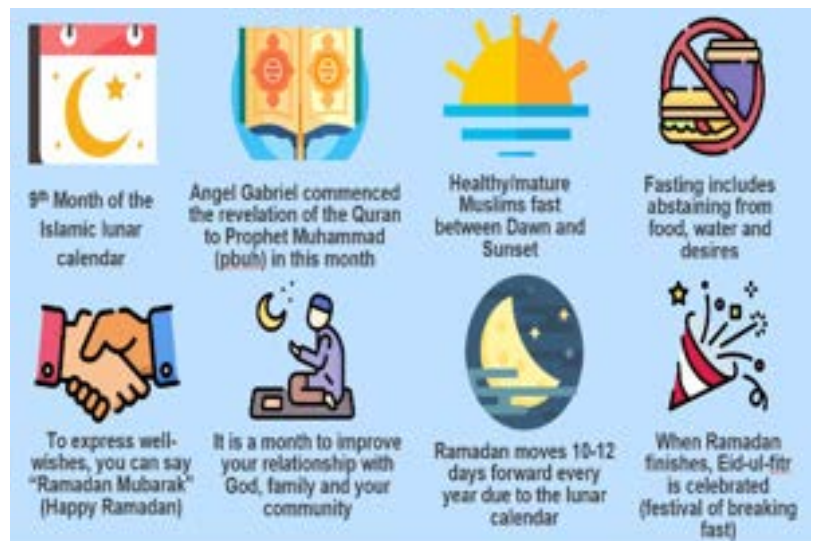
Faith festivals

Fasting during Ramadan

Ramadan is the blessed month in which the first verses of the Quran were revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) on a special night Laylat al-Qadr (the Night of Power). It is described in the Quran as “better than a thousand months” (Quran 97:3).

As we dive into the magic of Ramadan, I wanted to share my journey with you – both on a personal and spiritual level, writes **Gizem Hassan**, Assistant Manager, KPMG. The month of Ramadan has always held a special place in my heart, marking a time of reflection, prayer, and spiritual growth. However, last Ramadan became a pivotal moment in my life as I made the decision to start wearing the hijab. Wearing the hijab has since become a seamless part of my identity. It serves as a constant reminder of my faith and has opened doors to new conversations, understanding, and a deeper sense of purpose.

Fasting during Ramadan isn't just about giving up food and water from dawn to sunset. Surprisingly, that's the easy part. The bigger picture is all about refreshing ourselves, both physically and mentally. For me, fasting during Ramadan is like hitting the reset button for my soul. It's a time when I turn inward, reflecting on my relationship with Allah (God) and seeking spiritual renewal. Ramadan teaches me not to take anything for granted and to appreciate all the blessings in my life.



Coming up in our next issue

- Multifaith collaboration at work
- The Tower Hamlets Faith Forum
- Pilgrimage from different faith perspectives
- The beginning of a series 'What makes us human and unique?' in light of the growing use of AI.

If you would like to receive our newsletters, or read past editions, Please click [here](#).



Why not listen to our weekly podcast?

We have a new five-minute podcast every Monday morning – [bookmark](#) us for a regular listen.

Fancy a coffee and a chat?

All it takes is a quick call. A Chaplain will respond and try to meet with you the same day, or as soon as is mutually convenient. We can have a coffee and a chat, meet online, message or email. Whatever works for you. [Contact a chaplain](#).