

Faith Festivals February 2018

8th February or 15th February is Parinirvana or Nirvana day for our some of our Mahayana **Buddhist** friends. Nirvana Day is an annual festival that remembers the death of the Buddha when he reached Nirvana at the age of 80. It is celebrated by some Buddhists on February 15th.

Nirvana is believed to be the end of the cycle of death and rebirth. Buddhism teaches that Nirvana is reached when all want and suffering is gone.

Buddhists may celebrate Nirvana Day by meditating or by going to Buddhist temples or monasteries. On this day, Buddhists think about their lives and how they can work towards gaining the perfect peace of Nirvana. Buddhists believe that loss and change are things to be accepted rather than causes of sadness. They remember friends or relations who have recently died and reflect on the fact that death is a part of life for everyone. The idea that nothing stays the same is central to Buddhism. In monasteries Nirvana Day is treated as a social occasion. Food is prepared and some people bring presents such as money, household goods or clothes. As with other Buddhist festivals, celebrations vary throughout the world.

More at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/holydays/parinirvana.shtml>

13th February Shrove Tuesday Christian (Western Churches). 'Shrove' relates to absolution from sin. Nowadays it is a day for eating and enjoyment. In Britain it is called 'Pancake Day', as pancakes use up all the rich foods before Lent. Elsewhere it is known as Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday), and is a time for carnivals and fairs.

13th February is MahaShivaratri/Shiva Ratr for our **Hindu** friends. Maha Shivaratri or Shivratri, the night of the worship of Lord Shiva, is a major festival which occurs on the 14th night of the new moon during the dark half of the month of Phalguna. It falls on a moonless February night, when Hindus offer special prayer to the Lord Shiva. Shivaratri (Sanskrit 'ratri' = night) is the night when he is said to have performed the Tandava Nritya or the dance of primordial creation, preservation and destruction. The festival is observed for one day and one night only. People often fast on the night of Shivratri and sing hymns and praises in the name of Lord Shiva. Hindu temples across the country are decorated with lights and colourful decorations and people can be seen offering night long prayers to Shiva Lingam. Wood apple leaves, cold water and milk are offered to the Shiva Lingam on this day as they are believed to be Lord Shiva's favourite. Shivratri is considered especially auspicious for women. Married women pray for the well-being of their husbands and sons, while unmarried women pray for an ideal husband like Shiva, who is the spouse of Kali, Parvati and Durga. But generally it is believed that anyone who utters the name of Shiva during Shivratri with pure devotion is freed from all sins. He or she reaches the abode of Shiva and is liberated from the cycle of birth and death. For more see

<http://www.calendarlabs.com/holidays/india/maha-shivratri.php> and <http://hinduism.about.com/od/festivalsholidays/p/mahashivratri.htm>

14th February ASH Wednesday Christian (Western Churches) This first day of Lent recalls the temptations Jesus faced for forty days in the wilderness. In Catholic and some Anglican churches, worshipper's foreheads are marked with a cross of ash made from burning the palm crosses of the previous year – hence 'Ash Wednesday'

14th February – 31st March LENT Christian (Western Churches) A period of forty days fasting and self-discipline (not counting Sundays) that leads up to Easter. Traditionally Christians give up something during this time to mark the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness. Many Christians feel it is a time for study groups, prayer and Bible reading. Source: <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/religious-festivals>

16th/17th February LOSAR Buddhist. Tibetan New Year festival, often observed in Nepal as well. It celebrates the miracles performed by the historical Buddha at Saravasti, the capital city of the kingdom of Kosala.

19th February FIRST DAY OF LENT / THE GREAT FAST Christian (Orthodox) This is the beginning of the Lenten Fast, which involves abstinence from meat, fish and dairy products until Easter. Source: <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/religious-festivals>