

FASTING RESOURCE GUIDE



GUIDE TO FASTING

The following is a guide to help you prepare to fast and know what to expect, especially if you decide to fast for longer periods. We're not medical experts; the following are general tips to help make the fast a more enjoyable experience. Please consult a doctor if you have any medical conditions that could impact your ability to fast such as diabetes or heart problems. You're also encouraged to do your own research ahead of the fast.

Let's be honest – fasting is not meant to be a pleasant experience, at least at first. If it were, it wouldn't carry the moral weight and power that it does. Fasting is an act of sacrifice, one that we are undergoing because of our belief in bringing about a better world for farmworkers and for all people. Fasting, however, can be and has been an act of sacrifice that is safe, contemplative, tremendously powerful, community-building, life-altering, and positive.

The human body is an amazing machine. We take it for granted. It is capable of much more than many of us give it credit for. It can climb mountains, run marathons and, yes, it can function without food for long periods of time.

The body is designed to fast – we do it every night. The Interfaith Fast for Farmworker Justice will be a relatively short – and very feasible – stretch to go without food.

Preparation

- ◆ It'll be easier for your body to adjust to the state of fasting if you taper off consumption of caffeine, salt, sugar, meats, dairy, fried foods and such in the days leading to the fast.
- ◆ Think about eating smaller meals for a couple days before the fast to get used to the sensation (and to start the process of shrinking your tummy!) and increase your intake of fresh fruits and vegetables, water and, if you like, herbal teas.

What to Expect

- ◆ The surprising fact is that after the initial difficult one or two days of fasting, most people experience little desire for food. Many people report feeling their hunger replaced by focus and mental clarity.
- ◆ Don't assume that you will feel like you are "starving" because you won't be starving. You will be fasting, a period of abstinence from food during which the body's nutrient reserves are adequate to meet the body's nutritional needs.

- ◆ We will have volunteer medics/nurses/doctors on-site and will be conducting daily health checks as a precaution
- ◆ During the fast it's normal for one's breath and sweat to become more disagreeable and noticeable as your body releases pent-up toxins. Sugar-free gum and mouthwash help.
- ◆ You might experience some lightheadedness if standing or moving quickly from a sitting or prone position due to the fact that your body is trying to conserve energy and therefore the heart pumps slower and blood pressure lowers. To ameliorate this sensation, get down on one knee or sit. Lowering your center of gravity helps with the blood flow.

Maximizing Your Comfort During the Fast

- ◆ Be realistic about the effects a fast may have on you. Don't be ashamed to ask for help if you are not feeling well; don't be ashamed to stop fasting for medical reasons. We all have our own unique role to play in this struggle.
- ◆ Remember why we are fasting. Consider keeping a journal. Write in your journal or engage in meditation or contemplation during the times you would normally be eating. The workshops and vigils scheduled through the course of the week will help distract you from the fact you're fasting, not to mention adrenaline and the growing sense of community and camaraderie with fellow fasters and the buildup of support over the course of the week.
- ◆ Avoid caffeinated beverages. Avoid all alcohol, and any drugs not prescribed by a doctor, including aspirin. Drink plenty of water and take advantage of the natural electrolyte mix that we will have on hand to keep your body humming along. Even if you don't feel thirsty, drink two liters of fluids every day.
- ◆ Get plenty of rest. Go to sleep at "lights out" time, for your own benefit and for that of your fellow fasters. Don't be ashamed to rest or nap during the day. Physical weakness and low energy are normal when fasting.
- ◆ Stay warm and avoid unnecessary physical exertion.

Breaking the Fast

- ◆ When breaking a fast, care must be taken to start slowly with juices and bland soups, and then progress slowly with frequent small meals to normal food.
- ◆ Don't overeat at first – not only has your body slowed down, but your stomach has begun to shrink. Avoid rich cuisines initially. Foods such as fruit, eggs, cheese, and meat should be reintroduced into your diet slowly. Eat slowly and chew your food well!

HISTORY OF FASTING

“Fasting: A Spiritually and Socially Transforming Practice”

The Rev. Noelle Damico, Senior Fellow, National Economic and Social Rights Initiative

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Fasting is a spiritual practice embraced by many faith traditions. People of faith may be familiar with fasting at Ramadan within the Muslim community or fasting undertaken during Lent in the Christian community. Fasting has an ancient history and is part of scriptural texts that inspire faith.

In Jonah we find that the people of Ninevah illustrate their desire to repent and live rightly by putting on sackcloth and ashes and observing a fast (Jonah 3:5-10). The prophet Isaiah warns that fasting must be connected to the seeking of justice, else it is a hypocritical action to which God will not respond (Isaiah 58:1-14). Though Jesus did not proscribe fasting, he presumed that his followers engaged in the practice of fasting, giving instructions to limit prideful exhibitions (Matthew 6:16). In Islam, siyam (fasting) means abstinence from doing something. Principles of fasting are set in the Koran (Surah II: The Cow, Verses 177-187) so that practitioners may learn self-restraint and hence refrain from wrongdoing. Fasting demonstrates submission to Allah (God).

There are a variety of “purposes” for fasting, but a central purpose is that of reconciliation – to God and to one’s neighbor. From the practice of fasting we should be able to see God’s vision for our world more clearly and become determined to live with integrity. Fasting helps us identify the grave injustices around us, acknowledge and take responsibility for our participation and complicity in such injustice, and prepares us to act with God to transform ourselves and our world.

Prayer is an important complement to fasting and focuses our confessions and intercessions. Practitioners of fasting often report an intensity to their prayer lives – as if the shedding of food for a period makes space in the mind, heart, body, and soul for God. While fasting heightens the believer’s spiritual awareness, it also brings lasting insights into the physical needs of the body and the daily struggles of those who are hungry and poor. When we fast, we physically experience in a small way the evil of hunger that daily deprives millions of our sisters and brothers of health and life.

Renown leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Cesar Chavez, and Martin Luther King Jr. fasted. Gandhi was a Hindu whose fasts were acts of satyagraha (or non-violent resistance). The fasts were directed toward those who had said they cared about him in an effort to encourage them to realize their mistakes and correct themselves. He

regarded the process of fasting as one of purification. While rejecting the practice of fasting in order to convince another of one's ideals, Gandhi believed that hunger strikes were called for when inhumanity was practiced. Gandhi expected those who were engaging in civil disobedience to prepare themselves to "love their enemy" through fasting prior to engagement. While such fasting may have the consequence of changing the mind of others, the fast deepens the commitment and clarity of the practitioner to non-violent approaches to resolving injustice and conflict.

Cesar Chavez, organizer and leader of the United Farm Workers, was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's teaching and practice. Cesar was a Catholic believer who fasted, and encouraged others to fast, as a way of drawing attention to the injustices faced by the migrant workers who were seeking to organize and as a way to demonstrate to his own people the power and possibility of non-violence. Such fasting was an extension of the grape boycott, another non-violent means of seeking change. Just as in the Wendy's boycott we abstain from buying the company's products as a peaceful way of expressing disapproval and seeking change, in this fast we abstain from food in order to peacefully protest the injustice faced by Florida tomato pickers and prepare ourselves to diligently work for transformation in the fast food and agricultural industries.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. also regularly fasted. Though he and Cesar Chavez never met, Martin sent Cesar a telegram during his 25 day fast in Delano which read, "As brothers in the fight for equality, I extend the hand of fellowship and good will and wish continuing success to you and your members...You and your valiant fellow workers have demonstrated your commitment to righting grievous wrongs forced upon exploited people. We are together with you in spirit and in determination that our dreams for a better tomorrow will be realized." Dr. King once preached, "What does it profit a man to be able to eat at an integrated lunch counter if he doesn't have enough money to buy a hamburger?" He knew that genuine equality was impossible in a climate of dramatic economic inequality.

And so you are invited to join this fast for justice and fair food with members of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. May it be a time of purification for you, as you seek truth and clarity. May it be a time of divine encounter, when you experience the presence and power of God. May it be a time of community, as the workers are strengthened by your witness, and you are strengthened by theirs. And finally, may it be a time of re-orientation, that you may name the patterns of injustice and commit anew to their transformation. May we be the change we wish to see in the world.

SUGGESTED FASTING STRUCTURE

This is a basic framework to help shape your day(s) of fasting.

Morning: Fasting can deepen and strengthen our understandings of ourselves and our world. As you begin your day of fasting, consider your reasons and hopes for your fast. Instead of breakfast, reflect on one or more of the guiding questions included in the resource guide.

Afternoon: At your normal lunchtime, notice how your body feels and reflect on the meaning of fasting in your own tradition. Whether fasting to you is a sign of mourning or sacrifice, self-control or compassion, fasting has a history in many traditions as a form of social action. Take action by signing and sending a Wendy's Boycott postcard and/or delivering a letter to your local Wendy's manager (both linked in "Take Action" portion of resource guide). Share with Wendy's leadership and/or your local manager about your decision to go without food in solidarity with farmworkers.

Evening: Fasting is also often a communal practice. Instead of dinner, share about your fast with your community by writing an article for your congregation's newsletter and/or writing an op/ed or letter to the editor for your local news publication. Feel free to contact **Shelby** (shelby@allianceforfairfood.org) for support and resources.



GUIDING REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Our history:

- ◆ How is the oppression of Florida's farmworkers a part of America's history and the legacy of exploitation in our fields?
- ◆ What does this teach us about our responsibility to care for and reform institutions?
- ◆ What is our own role as farmworkers lead a boycott of Wendy's until they join the Fair Food Program?

Our experiences:

- ◆ Think about your relationship to food, and that of your family and/or community. Have you ever grown food?
- ◆ What can we learn from our own experience farming, gardening, or eating that can contribute to our contemplation of farmworker justice?

Our traditions:

- ◆ In each of our traditions' scriptures, where can we see an analogous situation to the struggle for farmworker justice taking place?
- ◆ How have our ancestors overturned injustice in the past?

Our voices:

- ◆ How are we to interpret and address much of our nation's silence in response to Wendy's decision to move their tomato purchasing to Mexico from Florida?
- ◆ How might we morally express the problems with Wendy's refusal to join the Fair Food Program?

CALLS TO ACTION

Faith traditions call us to couple prayer with action. Amplify the impact of your fast:

- ◆ Deliver a letter to a local Wendy's store and/or hand out flyers outside. Simply visiting a nearby Wendy's, asking to speak with the manager, explaining why you are fasting, and [asking that they pass your letter](#) to Wendy's leadership can have a big impact, as can sharing about your fast with passersby by handing out flyers.
- ◆ Write an op/ed or letter to the editor about your fast and the Wendy's Boycott. Contact us for support and resources.
- ◆ Write an article for your congregation's newsletter and/or denomination's publication. Share with your community why you are fasting, how the struggle farmworker justice connects with your tradition, and how your community can get involved in the Wendy's Boycott.
- ◆ Send a postcard to Wendy's leadership. [You can download a form here](#), or feel free to write your own message to Wendy's executives about why you are fasting and why the company should join the Fair Food Program.
- ◆ Invite a CIW farmworker member to your congregation to share about their work for justice in the fields. One of the most powerful actions you can take is educating members of your community about the history of abuse in the agriculture industry, how the Fair Food Program is bringing justice to the fields, and how they can participate. Contact us at shelby@allianceforfairfood.org for details.
- ◆ [Donate the money you would have spent on food to the Wendy's Boycott Fund](#). In response to the tremendous momentum building in the Wendy's Boycott, the Alliance for Fair Food is aiming to raise \$25,000 to fuel escalating action. Your financial support brings us closer to victory.
- ◆ Take to social media using the hashtag **#BoycottWendys** to share about your fast with your online community. Consider posting a photo of yourself holding a sign explaining your fast.