

Interfaith Calendar Holiday Descriptions

July 2013 - June 2014

Link to Interfaith calendar: <http://www.interfaithcalendar.org/2013.htm>

Ramadan (Islam): July 9th, 2013–evening of August 7

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about dates of significance within several world religions. This message relates to Ramadan which begins on July 9th this year.

Ramadan is observed on the ninth month of the Islamic Lunar calendar, when Muslims believe Allah revealed the first verse of the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam. During this sacred month, Muslims from around the world spend the daylight hours fasting. Muslims use this time for inner reflection, devotion to God and self-control. Fasting serves many purposes: While they are hungry and thirsty, Muslims are reminded of the suffering of the poor. Fasting is also an opportunity to practice self-control and to cleanse the body and mind. And in this most sacred month, fasting helps Muslims feel the peace that comes from spiritual devotion as well as kinship with fellow believers.

Ramadan will end the evening of August 7, commencing a joyous three day festival, "Eid al-Fitr." "Fitr" means "to break," as Muslims end the fasting period with food and festivities.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://islam.about.com/od/ramadan/f/ramadanintro.htm>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/practices/ramadan_1.shtml

<http://www.colostate.edu/orgs/MSA/events/Ramadan.html>

<http://www.pewforum.org/Muslim/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-2-religious-commitment.aspx>

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Obon (Buddhism): July 13 – 15, 2013

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about dates of significance within several world religions. This message relates to Obon which is observed July 13th-15th this year.

Obon, also referred to as "The Festival of the Souls," is one of the most important Japanese traditions. Obon was originally celebrated around the 15th day of the seventh month in the lunar calendar. Obon periods are nowadays different in various regions of Japan. Therefore, Obon is celebrated in some regions around August 15th and other regions around July 15th. During Obon people believe that their ancestors' spirits come back to their homes to be reunited with their family. This is the time when people can pray for the spirits and guide and help their ancestors' spirits to find peace.

During this festival period of 3 days, families hang lanterns outside their homes and beside the graves to welcome the souls home. Japanese people also clean their homes and place a variety of food offerings such as vegetables and fruits in front of a butsudan (Buddhist altar) for their ancestors' spirits. Chochin lanterns and flower arrangements are also usually placed by the butsudan. During this period people also gather for outdoor dances known as Bon dance.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://gojapan.about.com/cs/japanesefestivals/a/obonfestival.htm>

<http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2286.html>

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Asalha Puja Day (Buddhism): July 22, 2013

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about dates of significance within several world religions. This message relates to Asalha Puja Day which is celebrated on July 22nd this year.

Asalha Puja Day, also known as Dhamma Day, is one of the most sacred days in Buddhism and celebrates the first teaching of the Buddha. The festival is celebrated on the full moon day of the 8th lunar month, Asalha, of the old Indian calendar. Asalha also marks the starting of the monsoon. During this period the Buddha and his monks and nuns would hold their wanderings. Even today, monasteries keep a three month long 'rains retreat' which commences on Dhamma day and concludes on Pavarana. Dhamma Day is usually celebrated with readings from the Buddhist scriptures, and is an opportunity to reflect deeply on one's content, purify one's spirit and maintain peacefulness. If an individual practices Buddhism within a monastic tradition, Dhamma Day is, wherever possible, celebrated in a temple, Buddhist centre or monastery in the presence of monks or nuns.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

http://en.m-culture.go.th/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=34:asalha-puja-day&catid=30:the-important-days-in-thailand&Itemid=40

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/holydays/dharma.shtml>

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Eid al-Fitr (Islam): August 8 -11, 2013

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world-faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about dates of significance within several world religions. This message relates to Eid al-Fitr which is celebrated on

August 8th-11th this year, marking the culmination of Ramadan, a sacred time of fasting and prayer for Muslims.

Eid al-Fitr is one of the two most important Islamic celebrations. "Fitr" means "to break," as Muslims now end the Ramadan fasting period with food and festivities. Eid al-Fitr is a three day celebration where people dress in their finest clothes, adorn their homes with lights and decorations, give treats to children, and enjoy visits with friends and family. On the day of Eid, Muslims gather early in the morning in outdoor locations or mosques to perform the Eid prayer. This consists of a short congregational prayer followed by a sermon. A sense of generosity and gratitude colors these festivities. Although charity and good deeds are always important in Islam, they have special significance at the end of Ramadan. As the month draws to a close, Muslims are obligated to share their blessings by feeding the poor and making contributions to mosques.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

http://islam.about.com/od/ramadan/f/eid_fitr.htm

<http://www.history.com/topics/ramadan>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/holydays/eidulfitr.shtml>

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Krishna Janmashtami (Hindu): August 28, 2013

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about dates of significance within several world religions. This message relates to Krishna Janmashtami which is celebrated on August 28th this year.

Krishna Janmashtami is a celebration of the birth of Lord Sri Krishna, who Hindus consider to be their leader, hero, protector, philosopher, teacher and friend. The celebration is spread over two days, the first day is called Krishan ashtami or Gokul ashtami and the second day is called Kaal ashtami or Janam ashtami. During this celebration Hindus are likely to forego sleep and sing traditional Hindu songs. Because it is believed that Krishna was born at midnight, it is at this time that the true festivities begin. Food is prepared with milk and curds which are said to be some of Krishna's favorites and dances and songs are used to venerate and remember this supreme God. Some choose to fast the first 24 hours and only eat after the midnight celebrations. They also recite hymns from the gita, sing devotional songs and chant mantras.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/holydays/janamashtami.shtml>

<http://hinduism.about.com/od/festivalsholidays/a/janmashtami.htm>

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exhaustive list of significant dates for all faith and philosophical traditions. Likewise, the practice of special dates may differ based on region, denomination or generational differences.

Rosh HaShanah (Judaism): September 5-6, 2013

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about dates of significance within several world religions. This message relates to Rosh HaShanah which is observed September 5th- 6th this year.

Rosh HaShanah is the Jewish New Year. It falls during the month of Tishrei and occurs ten days before Yom Kippur. Together, Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur are known as the Yamim Nora'im, which means the "Days of Awe" in Hebrew. In English they are often referred to as the High Holy Days. Rosh HaShanah is observed on the first two days of Tishrei. Jewish tradition teaches that during the High Holy Days God decides who will live and who will die during the coming year. As a result, during Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur (and in the days leading up to them) Jews embark upon the serious task of examining their lives and repenting for any wrongs they have committed during the previous year. Jews are encouraged to make amends with anyone they have wronged and to make plans for improving during the coming year. Rosh HaShanah is about making peace in the community and striving to be a better person; it is a contemplative time filled with hope for the New Year.

No work is permitted on Rosh HaShanah and much of the day is spent in the synagogue. An important symbol of Rosh HaShanah is the shofar, an instrument often made of ram's horn. It is blown one hundred times during each of the two days of Rosh HaShanah. The sound of the shofar blast reminds people of the importance of reflection during this important holiday. Other significant symbols of Rosh HaShanah include apples, honey and round loaves of challah. Apple slices dipped in honey represent hope for a sweet new year and are traditionally accompanied by a short prayer before eating. On the first day of Rosh HaShanah a ceremony called Tashlich takes place and symbolizes casting off the sins from the previous year. They do this by tossing pieces of bread or other food into a body of flowing water. On the second night of Rosh HaShanah it is customary to eat a fruit that is new for the season, pomegranate is a popular choice. Some people also choose to send New Year's greeting cards on Rosh HaShanah.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://www.history.com/topics/rosh-hashanah-history>

<http://judaism.about.com/od/holidays/a/roshhashanah.htm>

<http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday2.htm>

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Yom Kippur (Judaism): September 14, 2013

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about dates of significance within several world religions. This message relates to Yom Kippur which is observed on September 14th this year.

Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) is one of the two Jewish High Holy Days. The first High Holy Day is Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year). Yom Kippur falls ten days after Rosh Hashanah on the 10th of Tishrei, which is a Hebrew month that correlates with September-October on the secular calendar. The purpose of Yom Kippur is to bring about reconciliation between people and between individuals and God. According to Jewish tradition, it is also the day when God decides the fate of each human being for the next year. There are three essential components of Yom Kippur: repentance, prayer and fasting.

During this period Jews are encouraged to seek out anyone they may have offended and to sincerely request forgiveness so that the New Year can begin with a clean slate. This process of repentance is called teshuvah and is a crucial part of Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur the longest synagogue service in the Jewish year is held; here people spend time in deep prayer. Yom Kippur is also marked by 25 hours of fasting. The fast starts an hour before Yom Kippur begins and ends after nightfall on the day of Yom Kippur. In addition to food, Jews are also forbidden from engaging in sexual relations, bathing or wearing leather shoes. The prohibition against wearing leather comes from a reluctance to wear the skin of a slaughtered animal while asking God for mercy. It is also customary to wear white on the holiday, which symbolizes purity and calls to mind the promise that our sins shall be made as white as snow. Some people wear a kittel, the white robe in which the dead are buried.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://judaism.about.com/od/holidays/a/yomkippur.htm>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/holydays/yomkippur.shtml>

<http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday4.htm>

<http://www.history.com/topics/yom-kippur-history>

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Navaratri (Hindu): October 5 -13, 2013

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the Division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about dates of significance within several world religions. This message relates to Navaratri which is celebrated on October 5th-13th this year.

Navaratri is a Hindu festival that honors the Mother Goddess in all her manifestations. Navaratri takes place at the beginning of October and lasts nine days. During Navaratri God is adored as Mother and Hindus invoke the energy aspect of God in the form of the universal mother, commonly referred to as “Durga”. During this celebration Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati are worshipped as three different manifestations of Shakti or cosmic energy.

During Navaratri, some devotees of Durga observe a fast and prayers are offered for the protection of health and property – a period of introspection and purification. Navaratri is also traditionally an auspicious time for starting new ventures and communities get together for dances and nightly feasts. For many women, Navaratri is a time for shopping for new clothes and new pots. It is an auspicious time to buy gold or jewelry and the gold markets are open late each night. Women dress elaborately each day for the puja or rituals and nightly dances. Another part of the puja may involve designing *puja-thalis* or *aartis* which are decorated plates in honor of the mother goddess, Amba (Ambika).

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://hinduism.about.com/od/festivalsholidays/a/navaratri.htm>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/holydays/navaratri.shtml>

<http://www.patheos.com/Library/Hinduism.html>

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Eid al-Adha (Islam): October 15 - 18, 2013

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about dates of significance within several world religions. This message relates to Eid al-Adha which is celebrated on October 15th-18th this year.

Eid al-Adha is celebrated at the end of Hajj (an annual pilgrimage to Mecca) and lasts for three days. During this time, Muslims commemorate and remember Abraham’s trials and obedience to Allah.

Eid al -Adha remembers the occasion when Allah appeared to Abraham in a dream and asked him to sacrifice his son Isma’il as an act of obedience to God.

The devil tempted Abraham by saying he should disobey Allah and spare his son. Obedient and faithful, as Abraham was about to kill his son in, Allah stopped him and gave him a lamb to sacrifice instead.

During Eid al-Adha, some traditional Muslim countries families will slaughter an animal such as a sheep, camel, or goat as a sacrifice; however in most countries Muslims purchase a carcass from a butcher or buy generous portions of meat for a communal meal on Eid al-Adha. During Eid al-Adha many Muslims will also make a special effort to pray and listen to a sermon at a mosque, wear new clothes, and visit family members and friends. People also give money to enable poorer members of their local community and around the world to eat a meat-based meal.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://islam.about.com/od/hajj/a/adha.htm>

<http://www.cnn.com/2012/10/26/world/eid-5-things/index.html>
http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/religion/islam/eid_haj.shtml

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Diwali (Hindu): November 3, 2013

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about dates of significance within several world religions. This message relates to Diwali which is celebrated on November 3rd this year.

Diwali is one of the biggest festivals for Hindus, celebrated with great enthusiasm and happiness in India. The festival is celebrated for five continuous days, where the third day is celebrated as the main Diwali festival or 'Festival of Lights.' The festival celebrates the victory of good over evil, light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance. For many the festival also honors Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth – lamps are lit to help Lakshmi find her way into people's homes. Many people start the new business year at Diwali and some Hindus will say prayers to the goddess for a successful year. They also celebrate one of the Diwali legends, which tells of the return of Rama and Sita to Rama's kingdom after fourteen years of exile.

Different colorful varieties of fireworks are always associated with this festival. On this auspicious day, people light up diyas and candles all around their homes. They perform Laxmi Puja in the evening and seek divine blessings from the Goddess of Wealth. The festival of Diwali is never complete without an exchange of gifts. People present Diwali gifts to all near and dear ones.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/religion/hinduism/diwali.shtml>
<http://www.diwalfestival.org/diwali-meaning-significance.html>
<http://hinduism.about.com/od/diwalfestivaloflights/a/diwali.htm>

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Hanukkah (Judaism): November 28th – December 5th, 2013

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about dates of significance within several world religions. This message relates to Hanukkah which is celebrated November 28th – December 5th this year.

Hanukkah (sometimes translated Chanukkah) is a Jewish holiday celebrated for eight days and nights. Although according to Jewish law Hanukkah is one of the less central Jewish holidays, Hanukkah has become much more popular in modern practice because of its proximity to Christmas. Hanukkah starts

on the 25th of the Jewish month of Kislev, which coincides with late November-late December on the secular calendar. In Hebrew, the word "hanukkah" means "dedication." The name reminds us that this holiday commemorates the re-dedication of the holy Temple in Jerusalem following the Jewish victory over the Syrian-Greeks in 165 B.C.E.

According to the Talmud, one of Judaism's most central texts, Judah Maccabee and the other Jews who took part in the rededication of the Second Temple witnessed what they believed to be a miracle. Even though there was only enough oil to keep the menorah's candles burning for a single day, the flames continued to be lit for eight nights, leaving them time to find a fresh supply. This wondrous event inspired the Jewish sages to proclaim a yearly eight-day festival.

Every community has its unique Hanukkah traditions, but there are some traditions that are almost universally practiced. They are: lighting the hanukkiyah each evening, spinning the dreidel and eating fried foods (relating to the miracle of the oil). Jewish children may also receive gifts for Hanukkah – often one gift for each of the eight nights of the holiday.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/holydays/hanukkah.shtml>

<http://www.history.com/topics/hanukkah>

<http://judaism.about.com/od/holidays/a/hanukkah.htm>

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Advent (Christian): December 1-24, 2013

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about important holidays celebrated within several world religions. This message relates to Advent which is observed on December 1st-24th this year.

Advent is a Christian season that comes before Christmas, starting on the fourth Sunday before December 25th. The word Advent comes from the Latin word *advenio*, "to come to," and refers to the coming of Christ. Advent is primarily observed in Christian churches that follow an ecclesiastical calendar of liturgical seasons to determine feasts, memorials, fasts and holy days: Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican/Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian. However, some Protestant and Evangelical Christians may also observe the season.

Advent extends over four Sundays and is a season where Christians prepare for Christmas, the coming of Christ and prepare for celebrating the birth of Jesus by remembering the longing of the Jews for a Messiah. During Advent, Christians are also reminded of how much they also need a Savior, and look forward to his second coming even as they prepare to celebrate his first coming at Christmas.

Advent is usually marked by increased prayer, fasting, and good works. While the Western Church no longer has a set requirement for fasting during Advent, the Eastern Church, both Catholic and Orthodox,

continues to observe what is known as Philip's Fast, from November 15 until Christmas. The four Sundays of advent are often celebrated with four candles on an Advent Wreath, with one to be lit each Sunday. The first, second and fourth candles are traditionally purple, but the third candle is rose-colored. (The rose colored candle marks the passing of the midpoint of Advent, encouraging believers to continue in spiritual preparation as the Christmas nears). The fifth white candle is often lit on Christmas day in the center of the Advent wreath. Other traditions used to celebrate Advent include Advent calendars, wreaths and nativity scenes.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://catholicism.about.com/od/holydaysandholidays/p/Advent.htm>

<http://christianity.about.com/od/christmas/tp/allaboutadvent.htm>

http://www.sharefaith.com/guide/Christian-Holidays/advent_season.html

<http://christianity.about.com/od/christmas/tp/allaboutadvent.htm>

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Christmas: December 25, 2013

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about dates of significance within several world religions. This message relates to Christmas which is celebrated on December 25th, culminating the Advent season (December 1-24).

Christmas is both a sacred religious holiday and a world-wide cultural phenomenon. For two millennia, people around the world have been observing Christmas with traditions and practices that are both religious and secular in nature. Christians celebrate Christmas Day as the anniversary of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, whom they believe to be the long-awaited Messiah and Son of God, whose teachings form the basis of their religion. The New Testament has two accounts of Christ's birth, which have become known as "The Nativity Story." Christmas traditions vary greatly around the world and within different Christian denominations. For example, many Latin countries and Spain celebrate "Epiphany Day" or "Three Kings Day" on January 6, to commemorate the Magi (Wise Men) who followed a star to Bethlehem to adore the new born Jesus. The 12 days between Christmas and Epiphany Day are alluded to in "The Twelve Days of Christmas," one of the many traditional songs heard during the Christmas season.

Popular Christmas customs include attending church, doing charitable acts, exchanging gifts, decorating Christmas trees, singing Christmas carols and songs, sharing meals with family and friends and waiting for "Santa Claus" to arrive with gifts.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://www.history.com/topics/christmas>

<http://www.crivoice.org/cyepiph.html>

<http://tlc.howstuffworks.com/family/twelve-days-christmas1.htm>

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Kwanzaa: December 26, 2013-January 1, 2014

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about important holidays and cultural celebrations throughout the year. This message relates to Kwanzaa which is celebrated December 26th through January 1.

Kwanzaa is an American holiday originated in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, a professor of Black Studies. At this time of great social change for African Americans, Karenga sought to build a celebration that would honor the values of ancient African cultures and inspire African Americans who were working for progress. Kwanzaa is based on the year-end harvest festivals that have taken place throughout Africa for thousands of years. The name comes from the Swahili phrase *matunda ya kwanza*, which means "first fruits of the harvest." This Swahili phrase was chosen because the language is used by various peoples throughout Africa.

Central to the celebration of Kwanzaa is honoring a different principle each evening, believing these African values to be key in building strong, productive families and communities:

Unity: building a community that holds together

Self-determination: speaking for yourself and making choices that benefit the community

Collective work and responsibility: helping others within the community

Cooperative economics: supporting businesses that care about the community

Sense of purpose: setting goals that benefit the community

Creativity: making the community better and more beautiful

Faith: believing that a better world can be created for communities now and in the future

On each of the seven nights of Kwanzaa, families gather and a child lights one of the candles on the Kinara (candleholder), followed by discussion on that day's principle. Families that choose to celebrate Kwanzaa do so in their own ways; celebrations may include songs and dances, African drums, storytelling, poetry reading, gift giving, and a large traditional meal.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org/index.shtml>

<http://www.history.com/topics/kwanzaa-history>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kwanzaa>

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Chinese New Year (Lunar New Year): January 31, 2014

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about dates of significance within cultures and world religions. This message relates to the Chinese New Year which is celebrated on January 31st this year.

The Chinese New Year is the longest and most important celebration in the Chinese calendar. New Year festivities traditionally start on the first day of the month and continue until the fifteenth, when the moon is the brightest. In China, people may take weeks of holiday from work to prepare for and celebrate the New Year.

At Chinese New Year celebrations people wear red clothes, decorate with poems on red paper, and give children "lucky money" in red envelopes. Red symbolizes fire, which according to legend can drive away bad luck. The fireworks that shower the festivities are rooted in a similar ancient custom. In China, the New Year is also a time of family reunion. Family members gather at each other's homes for visits and shared meals, most significantly a feast on New Year's Eve. There is also the lantern festival which is held on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. Some of the lanterns may be works of art, painted with birds, animals, flowers, zodiac signs, and scenes from legend and history. In many areas, the highlight of the lantern festival is the dragon dance. Traditionally the dragon is held aloft by young men who dance as they guide the colorful beast through the streets.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/chinesenewyear1.html>

<http://www.history.com/topics/chinese-new-year>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese New Year](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_New_Year)

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Ash Wednesday (Christian): March 5, 2014

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about important holidays celebrated within several world religions. This message relates to Ash Wednesday which is observed on March 5th this year.

Ash Wednesday is a Christian holiday and has been honored by many Christians for well over ten centuries. Ash Wednesday falls at the beginning of Lent, a six-week season of preparation for Easter. In the earliest centuries, Christians who had been stuck in persistent sin had ashes sprinkled on their bodies as a sign of repentance, even as Job repented "in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). Around the tenth century, all believers began to signify their need for repentance by having ashes placed on their foreheads in the shape of a cross. This ritual continues in the Roman Catholic Church today and some other Protestant, Anglican, Evangelical and Lutheran churches also hold a special worship service on Ash Wednesday.

The ashes used on Ash Wednesday are usually derived from burning the blessed palm branches left from the last Palm Sunday celebration. The ashes are blessed, sprinkled with holy water and fumigated with incense. Ashes are placed on the foreheads of worshipers as a reminder of our mortality and sinfulness, many times being told "Man is dust, and unto dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). At some churches, believers wash the ashes off before leaving the church to symbolize that they have been

cleansed of their sins; in other churches, participants leave the ashes on when they leave, thereby "carrying the cross out into the world."

In the Catholic Church, Ash Wednesday is observed by fasting, abstinence from meat and repentance – a day of contemplating one's transgressions. The Anglican Book of Common Prayer also designates Ash Wednesday as a day of fasting. In other Christian denominations these practices are optional, with the main focus being on repentance.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/holidays/ash_wednesday.htm

<http://www.catholic.org/clife/lent/ashwed.php>

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/series/ash-wednesday-practice-and-meaning/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ash_Wednesday

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Lent: March 5–April 17, 2014

Description:

Lent is a 40 day period observed by some Christians: usually Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian and Anglican denominations. The 40 day period is used to spiritually prepare for Easter, the most important of Christian celebrations, when believers rejoice in the resurrection of their Savior, Jesus Christ. The Lenten period has been observed since apostolic times, as a period of reflection and penitence. The 40 days parallels the time that Jesus spent in the desert, before he began his public ministry (Mt 4:2).

Some Christians, especially Catholics, choose to "give up" an indulgence (such as sweets or watching television) during the 40 days, as a sign of repentance and an exercise in self-control. Or, some Christians may use the 40 days to exercise good works and positive spiritual habits (such as visiting the sick, sending money to a charity or reflecting on The Stations of the Cross, a series of 14 incidents relating to the suffering of Christ during the crucifixion).

Purple is the symbolic color used in some churches throughout Lent; purple is used for two reasons: firstly because it is associated with mourning and so anticipates the pain and suffering of the crucifixion, and secondly because purple is the color associated with royalty, and celebrates Christ's resurrection and sovereignty.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/holidays/lent.htm>

<http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/religion/re0527.html>

<http://christianity.about.com/od/holidaytips/qt/whatisashwednes.htm>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/holydays/lent_1.shtml

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15569a.htm>

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Magha Puja Day (Buddhism): March 16, 2014

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about dates of significance within several world religions. This message relates to Magha Puja Day which is observed on March 16th this year.

Magha Puja day, also called Sangha Day or Fourfold Assembly Day, in most countries is observed on the first full moon day of March. The day commemorates a time when 1,250 enlightened monks, disciples of the historical Buddha, spontaneously came together to pay respect to the Buddha. This festival honors the Sangha, or the Buddhist community and offers a chance to the people to reaffirm their faith and commitment to Buddhist practices and traditions. The Sangha or the spiritual community is extremely important in Buddhism because it is one of the three jewels of Buddhism apart from the Buddha and the Dhamma.

This festival is a chance for the community to come together and carry out meetings to discuss various aspects of the Buddha's teaching, indulge in group meditation and listen to talks given by senior members of the community. People sometimes gather at temples, usually in the morning, bringing with them offerings of food and other items for the monastics. Magha Puja observations usually feature processions, sometimes by candlelight. Observers walk around a shrine, Buddha image or through a temple three times, once for each of the Three Jewels – The Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://buddhism.about.com/od/buddhistholidays/a/maghapuja.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magha_Puja

<http://www.haidongta.com/magha-puja-day-2013-thailand.html>

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Festival of Holi (Hindu): March 17, 2014

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about dates of significance within several world religions. This message relates to the Festival of Holi which is celebrated on March 17th this year.

Holi (also called Holaka or Phagwa) is an annual festival celebrated on the day after the full moon in the Hindu month of Phalguna (early March). Although Holi is probably the least religious of Hindu holidays it is one of the most popular Hindu festivals. It celebrates spring, commemorates various events in Hindu mythology and is a time of disregarding social norms and indulging in general merrymaking. Originally, Holi was an agriculture festival celebrating the arrival of spring. Holi also commemorates

various events in Hindu mythology including the legend involving an evil king named Hiranyakashipu, the enduring love between Lord Krishna and Radha, and Lord Krishna in general.

Holi is spread out over two days and provides a temporary opportunity for Hindus to disregard social norms and indulge in merrymaking and celebration. During Holi, Hindus attend a public bonfire, spray friends and family with colored powders and water, and celebrate with friends and family.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://www.religionfacts.com/hinduism/holidays/holi.htm>

<http://hinduism.about.com/od/holifestivalofcolors/a/holybasics.htm>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/holydays/holi_1.shtml

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Easter & Holy Week (Christian): April 13-20, 2014

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about important holidays celebrated within several world religions. This message relates to Easter and Holy Week which is celebrated on April 13th-20th this year.

The week preceding Easter is known as Holy Week. It begins with Palm Sunday and is traditionally a week of somber reflection on the events preceding Jesus' death: his triumphant entry into Jerusalem; his betrayal by Judas; his Last Supper with his twelve apostles; his arrest, crucifixion and death; and his burial in a tomb.

On Palm Sunday Christians celebrate Jesus' procession into Jerusalem, which occurred several days before his death. According to the gospels, the people of Jerusalem spread branches from trees—identified specifically as palm branches in John's gospel—on the road to welcome Jesus as he rode a donkey into the city. Because of this, many Christian churches today offer congregants palm fronds as they enter the church on Palm Sunday. In some denominations, the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and of his death is read in church on Palm Sunday, juxtaposing the welcome Jesus received on one day with his betrayal and arrest a few days later.

On Holy Thursday (also called Maundy Thursday), Christians commemorate the Last Supper—a Passover meal that Jesus shared with his disciples the night before his death. During the meal, Jesus broke bread and offered his followers wine, saying "This is my body, given up for you." Many Christians consider this event to have been the institution of the Eucharist, which is a sacrament in some denominations.

Good Friday is observed on the Friday before Easter Sunday. On this day Christians commemorate the passion, or suffering, and death on the cross of the Lord, Jesus Christ. Many Christians spend this day in fasting, prayer, repentance, and meditation on the agony and suffering of Christ on the cross.

On Easter Sunday, Christians celebrate the resurrection of the Lord, Jesus Christ. It is typically the most well-attended Sunday service of the year for Christian churches. Christians believe, according to Scripture, that Jesus came back to life, or was raised from the dead, three days after his death on the cross. As part of the Easter season, the death of Jesus Christ by crucifixion is commemorated on Good

Friday, always the Friday just before Easter. Through his death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus paid the penalty for sin, thus purchasing for all who believe in him, eternal life in Christ Jesus.

Easter customs vary across the Christian world, but attending sunrise services, exclaiming the Paschal greeting and decorating the church with flowers are common. Secular Easter customs include coloring eggs, egg hunting, the Easter Bunny, and Easter parades, which are observed by both Christians and some non-Christians.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://christianity.about.com/od/holidaytips/qt/whatisseaster.htm>

<http://christianity.about.com/od/holidaytips/qt/whatisgoodfrida.htm>

<http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Christianity/2007/03/FAQ-Christian-Holidays-During-Holy-Week.aspx#holyweek>

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Pesach/ Passover (Judaism): April 15-22, 2014

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about important holidays celebrated within several world religions. This message relates to Pesach which is observed on April 15th-22nd this year.

Pesach (Hebrew), known as Passover in English, is one of the most commonly observed Jewish holidays, even by otherwise non-observant Jews. Pesach begins on the 15th day of the Jewish month of Nissan. The primary observances of Pesach are related to the Exodus from Egypt after generations of slavery.

Pesach lasts for eight days (seven days in Israel). The first two days and last two days of the holiday (first and last in Israel) are days on which no work is permitted. Work is permitted on the intermediate days. The day before Pesach is the Fast of the Firstborn, a minor fast for all firstborn males, commemorating the fact that the firstborn Jewish males in Egypt were not killed during the final plague. On the first night of Pesach (first two nights for traditional Jews outside Israel), there is a special family meal, called Seder, filled with ritual to remember the significance of the holiday. The main ritual observances of this holiday center around Seder; the prohibition of chametz (leaven); and the eating of matzah (an unleavened bread). On the eve of the fifteenth day of Nisan, many Jews read from a book called the hagaddah, meaning "telling," which contains the order of prayers, rituals, readings and songs for the Pesach Seder.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/holydays/passover_1.shtml

<http://www.history.com/topics/passover>

<http://www.jewfaq.org/holidaya.htm>

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Visakha Puja Day (Buddhism): May 14, 2014

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about dates of significance within several world religions. This message relates to Visakha Puja Day which is observed on May 14th this year.

Visakha Puja Day, also known as Buddha day, is the holiest day for Buddhists and is celebrated by Buddhist communities all over the world. Visakha Puja Day marks the three important incidents in the life of the Lord Buddha on the same day – the Buddha’s birth, the enlightenment of the Buddha and the Nibbana (death) of the Buddha.

On Visakha Puja Day all Buddhists throughout the world gather together to perform the worship to recollect the wisdom, purity and compassion of the Buddha. Activities include going to temples for special observations, making merit, listening to Dhamma preaching, giving some donations and joining in other Buddhist activities. Much of the Buddhist community will also choose to abstain from alcoholic drinks and all other kinds of immoral acts, offer food to the monks and novices and attend the candle light procession around the Uposatha Hall, in the evening of the first day.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://www2.tat.or.th/visakhapuja/eng/about.html>

<http://www.dhammadownload.com/blog/2013/05/20/Visakha-Puja-Day>

<http://www.thaizer.com/festivals/visakha-puja-day/>

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Recognition of Atheism, Agnosticism, Secular Humanism and other reason-based ethics systems: May 1, 2014

In an effort to create more awareness about world religions and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about important key dates within several world religions and philosophies. This message seeks to educate the campus community about some of the reason-based perspectives held around the world.

Throughout the world, many people identify as atheist, agnostic, non-believer, humanist, freethinker, or others.

From the American Atheist website: “Atheism is the lack of belief in a deity, which implies that nothing exists but natural phenomena, that thought is a property or function of matter, and that death irreversibly and totally terminates individual organic units.” Some individuals who agree with atheism prefer to identify themselves as non-believers.

While there exists some disagreement about whether agnosticism is a method of arriving at atheism or is itself a unique perspective, essentially agnosticism is characterized by a sense of doubt in the existence of a deity.

Freethinkers, as defined by The American Heritage Dictionary, reject “authority and dogma, especially in...religious thinking, in favor of rational inquiry and speculation.”

From the American Humanist Association: “Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without theism and other supernatural beliefs, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.”

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

American Atheist: <http://atheists.org>

American Humanist Association: www.americanhumanist.org

Atheist Alliance International: www.atheistalliance.org

The Freethought Society: www.ftociety.org

Secular Coalition for American: <http://secular.org>

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Pentecost: June 8, 2014

Description:

In an effort to create more awareness about world faiths and philosophies, the division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach would like to notify campus community members about important holidays celebrated within several world religions. This message relates to Pentecost which is observed on June 8th this year.

Pentecost is a Christian holy day commemorating the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Jesus Christ, according to the New Testament of the Bible. It is also known as Whitsunday, or Whit Sunday. Pentecost, the Church's celebration of the gift of the Holy Spirit, comes from the realization that God's very life, breath and energy lives in, with and among us. Those who are Christians experience this life through Jesus because they see the Spirit so fully manifest in him. If you attend church on Pentecost Sunday, you will most likely hear read a passage from John's Gospel (20:19-23). It tells of a visit of the Risen Christ to the disciples huddled in fear. "Peace be with you," Jesus says. "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you." After saying this, Jesus breathed on them and added, "Receive the Holy Spirit." The breath, the life, of Jesus himself. We are God-breathed. Pentecost celebrates that reality.

In the United States, Christians share their perspective about the meaning of Pentecost as well as how the diversity of languages and cultures can enhance their worship and fellowship with each another. Christians see Pentecost as an expansion of God's favor and care from Judaism to all peoples. Many churches celebrate Pentecost with a mass or worship service on this day. Ministers in church often wear robes with red in the design as a symbol of the flames in which the Holy Spirit came to earth.

***This information was drawn directly from a variety of sources:**

<http://www.explorefaith.org/questions/pentecost.html>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/holydays/pentecost.shtml>

<http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/us/pentecost>

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