

## Multifaith Holidays/Observances Glossary

In addition to the 12 holidays that MMA formally observes, additional religious holidays and days of significance are shared for awareness purposes, as part of an effort to foster a more inclusive environment for employees, members and broader communities.

This is not an exhaustive list of religious holidays and days of significance, and will be updated periodically as requests for additions are made. If you feel that a day of significance is missing, or a description is inaccurate please contact Chief Equity Officer [Jill Harvey](#).

Below are brief descriptions of common additional holidays, observances and days of significance. They are categorized by religion, and are in order similar to when they would fall on the Gregorian calendar. This list can be referenced if you have questions about any of the days you see on the calendar, and are unsure of what it is and whether or not it is appropriate to schedule a meeting, event or program on that day. Observances marked with an asterisk \* are some of the highest holidays and should be considered when planning public meetings, events and programs.

### **Bahá'í**

- Ayyám-i-Há
  - Also known as Intercalary Days, Ayyám-i-Há is celebrated by people of the Bahá'í faith and is observed with gift-giving, special acts of charity, and preparation for the fasting that precedes the New Year.
- Nineteen-Day Fast\*
  - A designated 19-day period of fasting each year immediately before the Bahá'í New Year. The fasting is seen as a period of spiritual preparation and regeneration for the new year ahead, to bring one closer to God.
- Naw-Rúz, the Bahá'í New Year\*
  - The Bahá'í New Year celebrates the spring equinox, and is one of the 9 holy days of the Bahá'í faith, in which work is suspended. Naw-Rúz translates to “New Day”, and symbolizes the renewal of the world after winter.
- Ridvan\* 1st, 9th and 12th days
  - Ridvan, meaning “Paradise” in Arabic, is the 12-day festival in the Bahá'í faith commemorating Bahá'u'lláh's declaration that he was a Messenger of God. Ridvan is the most important of the Bahá'í holy days. The 9th and 12th days of the festival are also of significant importance.
- Declaration of the Báb\*
  - The day of the Declaration of the Báb, the forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í faith, commemorates when the Báb announced in 1844 that he was the new messenger of God. The holiday begins two hours and eleven minutes after sunset on a spring day in late May, which is the exact time the Báb made his declaration.
- Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh\*
  - The Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh celebrates the anniversary of the death of the founder of the Bahá'í faith, Bahá'u'lláh. This solemn anniversary is a day of rest, and is often observed by reading or chanting from the scriptures.
- Martyrdom of the Báb
  - The Martyrdom of the Bab is a holiday commemorating the July 9, 1850 execution of the co-founder of the Baha'i faith, the Báb, in Persia. On this day, the Báb was charged with apostasy and shot by order of the Prime Minister of the Persian

Empire. The Martyrdom is commemorated with prayers and scripture.

- Birth of the Báb
  - The anniversary of the Birth of the Báb, celebrates the herald of the new age for Bahá'ís. The Shrine of the Báb in Haifa, Israel, is part of the World Center of the Bahá'í faith.
- Birth of Baha'u'llah
  - The anniversary of the Birth of Baha'u'llah, who was the founder of the Bahá'í faith. All work is suspended on this day.
- Day of the Covenant
  - Day of the Covenant celebrates the anniversary of the appointment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Baha'u'llah, as the Center of the Covenant.
- Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
  - The Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá commemorates the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who was the eldest son and successor of Baha'u'llah.

## **Buddhism**

- Parinirvana Day, or Nirvana Day\*
  - Nirvana is believed to be the end of the cycle of death and rebirth. According to Buddhist teachings Nirvana is reached when all want and suffering is gone. Nirvana Day is the commemoration of Buddha's death at 80 years of age, when he reached the zenith of Nirvana. The dates and names of Buddhist celebrations vary significantly among cultures and communities, and across regions in Asia.
- Vesak, or Wesak\*
  - Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, is celebrated as Vesak, one of the most important Buddhist festivals that occurs in May or early June. The date changes annually, as it takes place at the time of the first full moon of the ancient lunar month of Vesakha. It was on the Day of Vesak two and a half millennia ago, in the year 623 B.C., that the Buddha was born. It was also on the Day of Vesak that the Buddha attained enlightenment, and it was on the Day of Vesak that the Buddha in his eightieth year passed away. Thus this day marks Gautama Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death, making it the most significant day in the Buddhist calendar. One should note that each Buddhist culture has its own traditions for the day, and it is celebrated in many different countries, including many across Asia such as: India, Thailand, and North and South Korea. In Tibetan culture Wesak commemorates only the enlightenment and parinirvana. Celebrations may include going to temple, meditation and reflecting on Buddhist teachings, and they may be observed on different days.
- Buddha Day\*
  - The commemoration of Buddha's birthday is celebrated on the day of the full moon of the 6th lunar month in most of South, Southeast and East Asia. The dates of this celebration vary significantly among Buddhist cultures and communities, but all commemorate the birth of the prince Siddhartha Gautama, who became the Gautama Buddha and founded Buddhism.
- Asalha Puja
  - Asalha Puja, or Dharma Day, is the celebration of Buddha's first teachings. This important Buddhist holy day, marks the day of Buddha's first sermon after reaching nirvana, which became the core of Buddhist teachings and the 4 noble principles. Asalha Puja falls on the full moon of the 8th lunar month (Asalha), usually in July. Believers make offerings at temples, meditate and practice dharma (dhamma), or righteous conduct. Additionally, it is on this day that monks begin three months of

retreat, called Vassa.

- Bodhi Day (Rohatsu)
  - In the northern tradition, this is the anniversary of the Buddha's Enlightenment, in 596 B.C.E. In the southern tradition, the Buddha's Enlightenment is celebrated during Wesak.

## **Christianity**

- Epiphany
  - Also referred to as Three Kings' Day, this holiday is observed by Eastern and Western Christians recognizing the visit of the Magi, or the three wise men or kings to the baby Jesus 12 days after his birth. This day is especially important in Latino/a cultures and in Orthodox churches.
- Orthodox Christmas
  - Eastern Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas 13 days later than other Christian churches because they follow the Julian calendar rather than the Gregorian version. Orthodox Christmas is always observed on January 7th.
- Candlemas
  - The Christian holiday that celebrates the presentation of the child Jesus, Jesus's first entry into the temple, and the Virgin Mary's purification.
- Great Lent
  - In Orthodox churches, the first day of Lent marks the beginning of the Great Fast, the final 6 weeks of a 10-week period leading up to Holy Week and Easter (Pascha). In the churches that follow the Gregorian calendar, Lent is a 6-week observance (40 days excluding Sundays) beginning with Ash Wednesday and culminating in Holy Week. It is a time of repentance and sacrifice in preparation for Easter.
- Shrove Tuesday/Mardi Gras
  - For Christians, on Shrove Tuesday many visit churches to confess their sins and clean their souls before the start of Lent. Mardi Gras dates back thousands of years, and is also known as Carnival and Carnaval, and is celebrated across the world. Festivals, masquerade and feasting are typically a part of the celebration.
- Ash Wednesday
  - On the Christian calendar, Ash Wednesday represents the first day of Lent, the 40 day season of reflection, prayer, sacrifice, and almsgiving that ends on Holy Thursday. Ash Wednesday is considered a special day of repentance observed by Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians marking the beginning of the season of prayer, repentance, and self-denial in preparation to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter. The name derives from the practice of marking of the faithful with ashes to signify penitence.
- Palm Sunday
  - For Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christian communities Palm Sunday, or Passion Sunday, marks the beginning of Holy week, the most significant and sacred time of year for Christians. Each year, Palm Sunday falls on the Sunday before Easter, and commemorates Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, in which he was welcomed by people waving palm branches. Holy Week is observed as the week of Jesus' sacrificial suffering, death and resurrection. Orthodox Christians often observe this Sunday on a date different from the date on which Protestant and Roman Catholics observe it.
- Holy Week\*
  - Holy Thursday
    - Also known as Maundy Thursday, Holy Thursday marks the end of Lent for Christians. Maundy comes from the Latin term *mandatum*, which means

command and symbolizes the commands that Jesus gave at the Last Supper to his disciples. This day commemorates the institution of the Lord's Supper/the Eucharist by Jesus prior to his arrest and execution. The date observed by Protestants and Roman Catholics differs from the date observed by Orthodox Christians.

- Good Friday\*
  - Good Friday or Holy Friday is the solemn day in which Christians observe the Passion and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Many Christians will attend service, fast and engage in prayer especially between the hours of noon and 3:00pm. Observed as "Holy Friday" by Orthodox Christians.
- Holy Saturday
  - Holy Saturday is the day before Easter and is observed by waiting, prayer and fasting. The act of waiting commemorates and symbolizes Christians waiting at the tomb in which Jesus was buried, anticipating his resurrection.
- Easter, Eastern Orthodox Easter/Pascha\*
  - Easter is the Christian celebration that commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 3 days after he was crucified. The traditional celebration begins after sundown on Saturday, but across the world Christian customs vary. Some observances include services, midnight vigil and breaking of easter eggs. Easter is the oldest and most important festival in the Christian year and initiates the 50-day period culminating in Pentecost. Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians often observe Easter on a different date than Orthodox Christians, but in some years they fall on the same day.
- Ascension of Jesus
  - 40 days after Easter, the celebration of Jesus' ascension into heaven and enthronement as universal sovereign is observed. The date observed by Protestants and Roman Catholics is often different from the date observed by Orthodox Christians.
- Pentecost
  - On the 50th day of Easter Christians celebrate Pentecost, the holiday commemorating the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and other followers of Jesus Christ while they were in Jerusalem celebrating the Feast of Weeks. Pentecost is sometimes referred to as Whitsunday, and some recognize it as the "birthday" of the Christian church. Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians often observe Pentecost on a different date from Orthodox Christians.
- All Saints' Day
  - All Saints' Day is a celebration of the lives of all the saints, especially those who do not have a special or dedicated day. Orthodox churches observe this day in mid-summer.
- All Souls' Day/Día de los Muertos
  - In some Latin cultures, this day is known as "The Day of the Dead." All Souls' Day is the Catholic Christian observance in memory of all the faithful who are deceased.
- Advent
  - Advent is the period of 4 weeks in which Christians prepare for Christmas and anticipate the second coming. In Western churches, the first Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of the Christian liturgical year.
- Christmas
  - Traditionally Christmas is a Christian celebration of the birth, or nativity of Jesus on December 25, with the Advent season ending on the 24th. But since the early 1900s

Christians and non-Christians have been celebrating Christmas as a secular family holiday that includes gathering and gift exchanges. In some Orthodox churches, Christmas falls on January 7.

## Hinduism

- Makar Sankranti
  - Makar(a) Sankranti is the only Hindu festival based on the solar calendar rather than the lunar calendar. The festival is a celebration of the sun's journey from the Southern Hemisphere to the Northern Hemisphere. Makar(a) means "Capricorn" and Sankranti means "transition", and so the festival is also a celebration and giving thanks to Mother Earth when winter begins to recede.
- Vasant Panchami
  - One of many festivals to honor the start of spring, marking the end of winter and preparation for Holi. This day is celebrated particularly in North India, where it is associated with Saraswati, the goddess of learning, and it also retains connection with the goddess Lakshmi.
- Kumbha Sankranti
  - Kumbha Sankranti is a Hindu festival that marks the beginning of the 11th month in the Hindu solar calendar. It signifies the periodic movement of the sun from one zodiac sign to another, and marks the movement of the sun from Makar(a) (Capricorn) Rashi to Kumbha (Aquarius). It falls in the Magha month of the Hindu lunar calendar.
- Maha Shivaratri\*
  - Maha Shivaratri is one of the most significant and largest sacred festival nights of India, honoring the Lord Shiva, just before the arrival of spring. The festival is also known as the Great Night of Shiva or Shivaratri. The night before the feast fasting is observed, texts are recited, songs are sung, and stories are told in honor of Lord Shiva whose cosmic dance creates, preserves, destroys, and recreates the world.
- Holi\*
  - Holi is a significant joyous spring festival, celebrated in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and other countries with larger Hindu and Sikh populations. Those who practice Jainism also celebrate Holi. Holi is also known as the Festival of Colors, Love and Spring, and people throw colored water or colored powder in celebration. Holi celebrates the eternal and divine love of the deities Krishna and Radha, and in some parts of India Holi is also dedicated to Kama, the God of Pleasure.
- Meena Sankranti
  - Meena Sankranti is a Hindu festival that is observed each year on the 14th or 15th of March, depending on the Hindu lunar calendar. This important festival marks the transition of the sun from Pisces to Aries, signifying the end of winter and the start of longer, warmer days and a time of new beginnings and prosperity.
- Chaitra Navaratri
  - Chaitra Navaratri is a 9-day festival that starts on the 1st day of the Hindu luni-solar calendar, celebrating the nine divine forms of the goddess Durga. Navaratri means "nine nights" and the festival consists of prayers, rituals, performances all dedicated and in celebration of Durga, the deity whose energy represents the triumph of good over evil.
- Ram Navami (Ramanavami)
  - Ram Navami is the Hindu festival that follows Chaitra Navaratri, and celebrates the birth of the seventh incarnation of the God Vishnu, Lord Rama. This festival is

celebrated with fasting, puja, acts of charity, and reading the Ramayana, one of the Hindu epics that tells the story of Rama.

- Mesha Sankranti
  - Mesha Sankranti is the first day of the solar New Year in the Hindu luni-solar calendar, and the exact timing of festivals across the world vary slightly. This period is believed to be fruitful for people who perform laborious tasks, and during the festival puja rituals are performed in return for special blessings from the deities Lord Shiva and Goddess Kali.
- Raksha Bandhan
  - Raksha Bandhan, sometimes referred to as Rakhi, is a Hindu Indian festival that celebrates and recognizes the loving bond and kinship between brothers and sisters. Often the day is commemorated by sisters tying a Rakhi (talisman or amulet) around their brother's wrist to protect them. Brothers provide a gift in exchange and become stewards of their sisters' security.
- Krishna Janmashtami\*
  - The holy Hindu festival of Krishna Janmashtami, also called Janmashtami, Gokulashtami, Shrikrishna Jayanti or Krishnasthmi, is celebrated annually on the 8th day of the dark fortnight which is called Ashtami of Krishna Paksh, and typically falls between August and September. The festival celebrates the birth and life of Lord Krishna, who is believed to be the most powerful and endeared soul and incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Observers will sing songs, or read scriptures to remember the lessons of his life.
- Ganesh Chaturthi\*
  - Ganesh Chaturthi is the Hindu festival that pays homage to Lord Ganesh, the remover of obstacles, and celebrates the day of his birth. Born to Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati, his name derives from 'gana' meaning the common people and so his name translates to "Lord of the People" as well as "Lord of the Ganas", and he is known to bring order in this universe. Lord Ganesh is one of the most revered Hindu personalities, and annually his birth is celebrated with a 10-day festival, during which four main rituals, namely *Prana Pratishtha*, *Shodashopachara*, *Uttarpuja*, and *Ganpati Visarjan* are performed.
- Shardiya Navratri
  - Navaratri is a 9-night (nav-rat) celebration of nine auspicious forms of Shakti/Devi (feminine divine power/the Goddess).
- Durga Puja\*
  - Durga Puja is the primary goddess revered during Durga Puja, but celebrations also include other major Hindu deities such as Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth and prosperity), Saraswati (the goddess of knowledge and music), Ganesha (the god of good beginnings), and Kartikeya (the god of war). In Bengali and Odia traditions, these deities are considered to be Durga's children and Durga Puja is believed to commemorate Durga's visit to her natal home with her beloved children. Today, the importance of Durga Puja is as much a social and cultural festival as it is a religious one.
- Dussehra (or Vijaya Dashami)\*
  - Navaratri ("nine nights"), is the 10-day festival that comes to a close with Dussehra on the 10th day of the festival. Dussehra celebrates and honors various goddesses, especially Durga, and Lord Rama, symbolizing the victory of good over evil.
- Diwali (Divali, Deepavali)\*
  - Diwali, the Festival of Lights, is one of the most significant celebrations in India and across the world and is celebrated by three major religions: Hinduism, Jainism and



Sikhism. While the holiday holds different symbolism for each religion, there are overarching themes of celebrating light over darkness and of lights, fireworks, and rejoicing. Diwali is perhaps the most popular of all Hindu festivals, and it is dedicated to the Goddess Kali in Bengal and to Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth, in the rest of India. As with several other festivals, Diwali is associated with one of the stories about the destruction of evil by Vishnu in one of his many manifestations. In Jainism, where the festival is also known as Mahavira Nirvana, Diwali celebrates the attainment of Moksha by Lord Mahavira. A burning lamp symbolizes the "light of knowledge" that dispels the darkness of delusion and ignorance.

## Islam

- Lailat al Miraj
  - Lailat al Miraj commemorates the ascension (al-Mi'raj) of the Prophet Muhammad to heaven following his night journey (al-Isra') from Mecca (Makkah) to Jerusalem and his return the same night. While sleeping in the Ka'bah, the sacred shrine of Mecca, Muhammad was visited by the archangels Jibril and Mikal. The archangels purified his soul and filled him with wisdom. He was then transported from Mecca on the back of the winged Buraq to Jerusalem. There, he ascended to heaven, met the previous prophets on the different levels of heaven, and eventually met God. He was then instructed on the importance of reciting salat, or prayer, five times a day. This is a very important and sacred day in the history of Islam.
- Lailat al Bara'a
  - Lailat al Bara'a, also known as Lailat al Bara'ah, Barat, Shab-e-Bara, or the Night of Forgiveness or Repentance, is an Islamic holiday in which practitioners of the faith seek forgiveness for sins. This occasion is also considered one of the most sacred nights on the Islamic calendar, and it begins at sundown on the 14th day of the lunar month of Sha'ban. On this night, God approaches the Earth to call humanity and to grant forgiveness of sins.
- First day of Ramadan\*
  - The first day of Ramadan marks the beginning of a highly sacred month that is focused on spiritual renewal. During the Holy Month of Ramadan Muslims who are physically able fast for the entire month, and do not eat or drink from the first sign of dawn until sunset in honor of the first revelations to the Prophet Muhammad. The evening meal is celebrated with family.
- Ramadan
  - Ramadan is one of the most sacred times for Muslims and is the 9th month of the Islamic calendar. During this time Muslims observe a strict fast from dawn until sunset, in which they are not allowed to eat or drink (even water), during daylight hours. Fasting is an individual act of worship bringing one closer to God. Ramadan is believed to be the month that the Holy Qur'an was sent down from heaven "as a guidance for men and women, a declaration of direction, and a means of salvation."
- Laylat al-Qadr\*
  - On the evening of the 27th day of Ramadan, Muslims observe a special night called Laylat al-Qadr, sometimes referred to as the Night of Power. It is believed that Muhammad first received the Holy Qur'an on this night.
- Eid al-Fitr\*
  - At the end of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr celebrates the breaking of the fast, which takes place the day after the new Moon is seen. Eid al-Fitr is one of the two main festivals in Islam. During Eid al-Fitr, many Muslims will go to their mosque for prayer, followed by friends and families gathering for festive meals and exchange of gifts.

Special gifts or donations to charity are also given to the poor.

- Hajj
  - Hajj, one of the five pillars of Islam, is the sacred pilgrimage performed by Muslims to the holy mosque of Masjid al-Haram in Makkah (Mecca), Saudi Arabia. At least once in their lifetime, as long as they have the means financially, physically and emotionally, every Muslim is obliged to make this pilgrimage. Hajj takes place during the same period each year – during the month of Dhul Hijjah, the 12th month in the Islamic Calendar. *Hajj* begins on the 8th of Dhul Hijjah and lasts until the 13th of Dhul Hijjah.
- Waqf al Arafah
  - Waqf al Arafah is the 2nd day of Hajj within the Islamic faith, it falls on the 9th of Dhul Hijjah, the day before Eid al-Adha. Arafah is also one of the most important days in the Islamic calendar. As, it was on this day that Allah perfected His religion, completed His favours upon His beloved Prophet Muhammad, and approved Islam as a way of life.
- Eid al-Adha\*
  - Eid al-Adha, the Festival of Sacrifice, is the Islamic festival commemorating the willingness of Ibrahim to follow Allah's command to sacrifice his son, Ishmael. It is the 2nd of the two most important festivals in Islam, and similar to Eid al-Fitr, a communal prayer, *ṣalāt*, is performed at daybreak on the first day. The festival lasts 3 to 4 days, and begins on the 10th day of Dhul-Hijja. Eid al-Adha marks the culmination of the Hajj at Minā, Saudi Arabia, near Mecca, and is celebrated by Muslims across the globe. It is a time for visiting with friends and family and for exchanging gifts. In commemoration of Abraham's faith, sheep, goats and camels are offered to God, and the meat is distributed to the poor and needy. Eid al-Adha is observed whether or not one is on pilgrimage.
- Islamic New Year/Al-Hijra Muharram
  - Al-Hijra Muharram marks the beginning of the new Islamic or Hijri calendar. The Islamic calendar is lunar rather than solar, and so the calendar depends on the sighting of the new moon or crescent to determine the start of each month. As such, Islamic observances are not tied to any season or time of the year, but rather to the event itself. This also assures that with the variations in temperature and length of the day, such observances as Ramadan are shared in an equal manner by different locations around the world. First of Muharram (Ra's al-Sanat Al Hijriyah), is the 1st day of the first month of the Islamic year. This day commemorates the Hijra ("migration") of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E., where the first Islamic community was established.
- Ashura ('Ashurah)
  - Many important events are believed to have taken place on this day, which occurs annually on the 10th of Muharram, the 1st month of the Islamic calendar. For Sunni Muslims, Ashura commemorates the day of Noah's leaving the Ark and the freedom and departure of the Children of Israel from Egypt with the parting of the Red Sea by Moses. Additionally for Sunni Muslims, it is a voluntary fast day. For Shia Muslims, it is a time of mourning commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad) at the Battle of Karbala.
- Mawlid Al-Nabi\*
  - Mawlid Al- Nabi is the annual festival celebrating the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, on the 12th of Rabi al-Awwal, the 3rd month of the Islamic calendar.



## Judaism

- Tu BiShvat or Tu B'Shevat or Tu B'Shvat\*
  - On the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Shevat, Tu BiShvat is celebrated as an ecological awareness day and celebration of the birthday of trees. Tu BiShvat is a non-religious festival that is one of the four Jewish “New Years” to remind us to be kind to our planet.
- Purim
  - Purim, known as the Feast of Lots, is the Jewish holiday that is celebrated each year on the 14th of the Hebrew month of Adar, that commemorates the salvation of the Jewish people from annihilation at the hands of Haman, in the ancient Persian Empire. Purim means “lots” in ancient Persian, and Purim is considered a joyous holiday, celebrated by wearing costumes, giving gifts to friends, giving to the poor, and socializing. Purim is a day of feasting, and is preceded by the Fast of Esther.
- Passover \*1st, 2nd, 7th and 8th days/nights
  - Passover, also known as Pesach, is the 8-day major Jewish holiday that commemorates the story of the Israelites’ escape from slavery and departure from ancient Egypt. Passover is observed by following strict dietary laws, and restrictions on work at the beginning and end of the celebration. The 1st night is celebrated with the seder, a family meal in which symbolic foods are eaten, retelling the story of Exodus and prayers and traditional recitations are performed. The Seder is a ritual meal that re-enacts that ancient deliverance and emphasizes the freedom of the Jews under the guidance of God.
- Yom HaShoah
  - In Israel Yom HaShoah is considered a national memorial day that is celebrated on the 27th day of the month of Nisan in the Hebrew calendar, typically falling in April or May in the Gregorian calendar. Yom Hashoah, also referred to as Holocaust Remembrance Day, is a day of mourning and many Jewish communities organize services, vigils and prayers to recognize the Jewish resistance and honor the 6 millions Jews murdered in the Holocaust.
- Lag BaOmer
  - Lag BaOmer is a Jewish holiday marking the day of hillula of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, that always takes place on the 18th day of the month of Iyar. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who lived in the 2nd century of the Common Era, was the first to publicly teach the mystical dimension of the Torah known as the Kabbalah, and on the day of his passing, he instructed his disciples to mark the date as “the day of my joy.”
- Shavuot
  - Shavuot is the Jewish Festival of Weeks, or Feast of Weeks, that celebrates the wheat harvest in Israel and commemorates the day when the Jews received the Torah and Commandments at Mount Sinai. Shavuot is celebrated on the 6th day of the month of Sivan in the Hebrew calendar, which typically falls in May or June in the Gregorian calendar, and marks the conclusion of the 7 weeks following Pesach (Passover).
- Tisha B'Av
  - Tisha B'Av is a day of mourning and repentance in remembrance of the destruction of the holy and sacred First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. It is the saddest day on the Jewish Calendar, the 9th day of Av, and during this time observers will fast and pray.
- Rosh Hashanah\*
  - The Jewish New Year and the anniversary of the creation of the world, Rosh Hashanah is the first of the Ten Days of Awe (also known as the Ten Days of Repentance) that conclude on Yom Kippur. It marks the beginning of the holiest time

of the year for Jews.

- Yom Kippur\*
  - The Day of Atonement, the most solemn day in the Jewish year is marked by fasting, prayer and seeking forgiveness. Yom Kippur is the holiest day on the Jewish calendar, and it is the conclusion of the Ten Days of Awe.
- Sukkot\* 1st and 2nd days
  - Sukkot is an eight-day long festival of thanksgiving for the fall harvest, also known as the Feast of Booths. Sukkot commemorates the 40-year wandering of the Jews on their way to the Promised Land, and the name refers to the booths (sukkot) used by Israelites during desert wanderings and constructed in the fields during the harvest season. It is a time of thanksgiving for God's presence in creation and among the Jewish people.
- Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah\*
  - Shemini Atzeret, The Eighth Day, is considered both the end of Sukkot and a distinct festival. Simchat Torah is the joyous festival in which the annual cycle of the reading of the Torah in the synagogue is completed and its first book begins again. The celebration typically includes singing, dancing, and marching with Torah scrolls.
- Hanukkah
  - Hanukkah (Chanukah), The Feast of Lights (Feast of Dedication), or Festival of Lights, is celebrated for 8 days to commemorate the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem following the Jews' victory over occupying forces in 165 BCE, which re-established for a time their religious and political freedom. The festival is marked by nightly lighting of the menorah, along with reciting special prayers and blessings. Often foods fried in oil are also significant during this time, as the origin story states that the menorah remained lit for eight days on only a one day supply of olive oil.

## **Latter-Day Saints**

- Anniversary of the Founding of the Church
  - The Anniversary of the Founding of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is celebrated annually on April 6, as this was the official date that Joseph Smith organized the church in 1830, in Fayette, New York. The Annual World General Conference of the Church is held on Saturday and Sunday closest to this date each year.
- Martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his Brother Hyrum
  - Pioneer Day commemorates the arrival of Brigham Young and the first group of Mormon pioneers into the Salt Lake Valley on July 24, 1847. Pioneer Day is a state holiday in Utah and is considered a special occasion by many members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This time is for recognizing all the people who contributed to building the state regardless of background or religion. The Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were assassinated in 1844 while incarcerated in Carthage, Illinois.

## **Pagan, Gaelic, Wiccan**

- Imbolc
  - Imbolc is the Gaelic, Pagan, and Wiccan traditional festival that symbolizes making way for spring and the rebirth of nature. Imbolc is the first fertility festival, celebrating the approach of spring and the growth of light in the darkness.
- Ostara/Spring Equinox
  - Ostara is the celebration of the Vernal Equinox, celebrating the equivalence of light and dark and the arrival of Spring.

- Beltane or Bealtaine is the Gaelic May Day festival
  - Beltane is one of the 4 major ancient Celtic, Pagan, and Wiccan holidays that is celebrated about halfway between the spring equinox and summer solstice. Beltane welcomes spring's warmth and light, whilst shedding winter's darkness. The celebration centers around bonfires and driving cattle between the bonfire flames, which symbolizes purification and protection. It is the final fertility festival, celebrating the Earth's fertility and anticipating the power of the sun and the Earth in summer.
- Summer Solstice/Litha
  - Litha, or the summer solstice, is celebrated by Wiccans and Pagans, and is the longest day and the shortest night of the year. Litha is recognized as a day of inner power and brightness, and is celebrated by some communities with festivals and rituals.
- Lammas/Lughnasa
  - Lammas is the first harvest festival, celebrating the sacrifices of the Earth, the sun for the harvest, and the diminishing strength of summer.
- Mabon/Fall Equinox
  - Mabon is the Autumnal Equinox and the second harvest festival, celebrating the equivalence of light and dark, the arrival of Autumn and thanksgiving for the Earth's bounty.
- Samhain
  - Samhain is the New Year and the final harvest festival, celebrating the last gifts of the Earth before winter and the return of the spirits of the dead.
- Yule/Winter Solstice
  - Yule is the Winter Solstice, celebrating the longest night and the blessings of darkness as well as the rebirth of the sun god.

## Sikhism

- Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh Ji
  - Guru Gobind Singh Ji (1666–1708) was the 10th and final Sikhmaster, Guru of Nanak. He created the Khalsa, the "Brotherhood of the Pure," and declared the Scriptures, the Adi 'Granth, to be the Sikh's Guru from that time on. The annual celebration of Guru's birthday is based on the Nanakshahi calendar.
- Maghi and Lohri
  - Maghi and Lohri are two distinct annual festivals, celebrated primarily in the Punjab region of India, but they often are discussed together. Maghi is also known as Makar Sankranti in other parts of India observed by Hindus, takes place the day after Lohri and is considered one of the most important holy days for the Sikh community. In the Hindu calendar, Maghi is celebrated on the first day of the month of Magh, which follows the mid-winter festival of Lohri which is marked by bonfires in North Indian fields and yards. Lohri marks the end of the winter-solstice and beginning of harvest season. Maghi, also termed Chali Mukte, commemorates the martyrdom of the "Forty Immortals," forty followers of Guru Gobind Singh who had previously deserted him but later rejoined him and fought bravely, ultimately dying in the Battle of Muktsar in 1705. Sikhs gather at Muktsar, Punjab, for a grand fair and take a dip in the sacred pond to purify their souls.
- Hola Mohalla
  - Hola Mohalla, "mock fight", is the 3-day Sikh festival that begins on the first full moon of March, in which Sikhs demonstrate their martial skills for mock battles. Hola is the masculine form of Holi, and it follows Guru Gobind Singh's tradition of following

the Hindu festival Holi by one day.

- Vaisakhi/Baisakhi
  - The holiday marks the start of the spring harvest celebration, and symbolizes the fight for the rights of all and standing up against oppression. In Sikhism, Vaisakhi is one of the most important dates in the Sikh calendar as it honors a pivotal moment in the evolution of the religion. In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th Sikh guru- or spiritual leader- unified Sikhs and formalized many aspects of the faith, by creating the Khalsa Panth (the “Brotherhood of the Pure”).
- Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev Ji
  - Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the 5th Guru, was the first Sikh martyr. He built the Golden Temple of Amritsar, also referred to as Harimandir Sahib, to emphasize that the Sikh way was open to all, regardless of caste. Symbolically he constructed the temple with doors facing all four directions. Guru Arjan also is honored for compiling and contributing close to 2,000 verses to the Sikh Scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib.
- Bandi Chhor Divas/Diwali
  - Diwali is one of the most popular of all Hindu festivals, also known as the Festival of Lights, and has historically been celebrated by Sikhs as well. Bandi Chhor Divas, “Day of Liberation”, coincides with the festival of Diwali, and this day was named by Sikh leaders in the late 20th century. Bandi Chhor Divas specifically celebrates the sixth Sikh guru, Guru Hargobind’s release from prison in 1619. According to tradition, upon release by Emperor Jahangir the Guru had a cloak made with 52 panels to allow for 52 kings he requested be released as well, to hold on to and leave with him, against the Emperor's ruling. Guru Hargobind arrived in Amritsar a few days later on Diwali, in which the entire city and the Golden Temple were lit up with lamps and candles.
- Installation of Granth Sahib Ji as Guru
  - This day celebrates the 10th and last human Sikh Guru Gobind Singh Ji’s recreation of the entire Sikh Scripture, known as the Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Gobind spent almost 5 years dictating the verses and the project was completed in 1705. The Guru Granth Sahib is seen as the living Guru and guide for Sikhs, that is revered for its wisdom and spiritual teaching. It was on October 20, 1708, that Guru Gobind gave his last sermon and conferred permanent gurudom on the second edition of the Granth. The Guru Granth Sahib is kept on a raised platform in gurdwaras, houses of worship, and Sikhs stand when the scripture is brought into a room.
- Guru Nanak's Birthday
  - Guru Nanak’s Birthday celebrates the birth of the founder and first Guru of Sikhism Guru Nanak Dev Ji. This is one of the most important holy days for Sikhs and is traditionally celebrated in November, but some believe it should be celebrated in April on Baisakhi Day the day in which the Guru was born.
- Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji
  - This day commemorates the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, the 9th of the 10 Sikh Gurus. He is remembered not only for his defense of the Sikh faith, but also of Hinduism and of religious liberty.

### **\*Other Traditional & Cultural Days of Significance**

- Lunar New Year (Cultural, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism)\*
  - Lunar New Year marks the beginning of the lunar calendar for the East Asian cultural sphere, and celebrations take place on the same date across the region on the new moon, based on the Chinese lunisolar calendar. Lunar New Year celebrations vary across the region, and each culture has its own unique

interpretation, zodiacs and traditions. Lunar New Year is one the most sacred traditional holidays that is marked by family reunion, feasting, and honoring household and heavenly deities and ancestors.

- Cinco de Mayo
  - Cinco de Mayo, the fifth of May, celebrates the Mexican army's victory over France at the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862. The Franco-Mexican war lasted from 1861 - 1867, and it should be noted that the celebration reflects the response of Mexicans living in California in the United States, in the 1860s. Mexico celebrates its independence from the French on September 16.
- Dragon Boat Festival
  - The Dragon Boat Festival is a Chinese holiday commemorating the life and death of Qu Yuan. Qu Yuan was an intellect, a poet and a loyal minister of the King of Chu in southern China, during the Warring States period, about 600 B.C. to 200 B.C.
- Obon
  - Obon (お盆) is a Japanese Buddhist festival, that honors and commemorates the spirits of one's ancestors, A Day of the Dead some may say, similar to the Western or Christian observance of All Soul's Day. During Obon, it is believed that ancestor spirits return to this world to visit their relatives. Traditionally lanterns are hung on houses to guide the spirits, obon dances (bon odori) are performed, and graves are visited with food offerings. The festival typically lasts 3 days, and falls on the 13th-15th days of the lunar calendar, but in different regions it may be observed using the Gregorian calendar and would be observed in July.
- Mid-Autumn Festival is a harvest festival celebrated in Chinese
  - Mid-Autumn Festival is also referred to as the Moon Festival or Mooncake Festival and it is the 2nd largest celebration in Chinese culture following the Lunar New Year. Moon Festival takes place on the 15th day of the 8th month in the Chinese lunar calendar, in which observers celebrate the full moon and give thanks for the Autumn harvest.
- Indigenous Peoples Day
  - Indigenous Peoples' Day is celebrated on the 2nd Monday of October and recognizes the resilience, sovereignty and contributions of Indigenous Peoples in the United States, even in the face of forced removal, assimilation, discrimination and genocide spanning generations. Historically, this day was known as Columbus Day to celebrate the "discovery" of America by Christopher Columbus in 1492. Indigenous Peoples populated America and the Western Hemisphere for thousands of years before European contact, and Indigenous Peoples' Day pays homage to that history that has been untold or erased.
- Native American Heritage Day
  - Native American Heritage Day takes place on the Friday following Thanksgiving of each year. This holiday offers a time to reflect, celebrate and recognize the traditions, history and stories of Native American and Alaska Native communities, and acknowledge their contributions to American history.
- Kwanzaa (Cultural- African American Heritage)
  - In 1966 Maulana Ron Karenga established Kwanzaa, an African American and Pan-African holiday that uplifts and celebrates history, values, family, community and culture. Kwanzaa is celebrated annually from December 26th to January 1st. The concepts of Kwanzaa are expressed in Swahili, one of the most widely spoken languages across the continent of Africa. There are 7 principles that are at the core of Kwanzaa, once for each day of the celebration. Kwanzaa comes to a close with a communal feast called Karamu, that typically happens on the 6th day.

## References

### General

[The Pluralism Project, Harvard Divinity School Multi-faith Calendar](#)  
[Religious Landscape Study \(RLS\) | Pew Research Center](#)  
[A Guide to Religious Observances | Resources | Center for Spiritual Life | Brandeis University](#)  
[Federal Holidays and Traditions | HISTORY](#)

### Bahá'í Faith

[The Bahá'í Faith -The Official Website of the Worldwide Bahá'í Community](#)  
[What Is the Baha'i Faith?](#)  
[Bahá'ís of the United States](#)  
[The Bahá'í Community of Canada](#)  
[The Origins and Practices of Holidays: The Declaration of the Báb](#)

### Buddhism

[Vesak: What is it and how do Buddhists celebrate Buddha Day or Wesak](#)  
[The Guibord Center- Buddhism](#)  
[PBS- The Basics of Buddhism](#)  
[United Religions Initiative - Buddhism Basic Beliefs](#)

### Christianity

[History of Christianity](#)  
[Christianity- The Pluralism Project, Harvard University](#)

### Hinduism

[The Hindu- Faith](#)  
[Hindu American Foundation](#)  
[Festivals of India](#)  
[Vishwa Hindu Parishad America](#)  
[Hinduism Today](#)  
[Hinduism- The Pluralism Project, Harvard University](#)  
[Hindu Calendar - Hindu Festivals & Panchang](#)  
[The Times of India- Religion- Festivals & Puja](#)

### Islam

[Islam- The Pluralism Project, Harvard University](#)  
[Brandeis, Guide to Religious Observances- Ramadan](#)  
[The Five Pillars of Islam- The Met](#)  
[The Pillars of Islam](#)  
[IslamiCity- Faith & Spirituality](#)  
[Eid al-Adha - Islamic festival](#)  
[Shia and Sunni Muslims commemorate Ashura](#)

### Judaism

[Jewish Practice and Jewish Holidays](#)  
[Judaism- The Pluralism Project, Harvard University](#)  
[Jewish festivals | Holidays, Major, Minor, & Importance](#)



[Judaism- BBC Bitesize Religious Studies](#)

Latter- Day Saints

[The Latter Day Saints Movement](#)

[The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints](#)

Pagan, Gaelic, Wiccan

[What Is the Ancient Celtic Festival of Beltane?](#)

[Paganism- The Pluralism Project- Harvard University](#)

Sikhism

[The Sikh Coalition](#)

[Sikhism- The Pluralism Project, Harvard University](#)

[SikhNet- Sikh Celebrations](#)

[Sikh Holy Days & Observances - The Guibord Center](#)

Other Traditional & Cultural Days of Significance

[Lunar New Year- History](#)

[What is the Mid-Autumn Festival?](#)

[National Museum of the American Indian](#)

[National Native American Heritage Month- U.S. Dept. Interior](#)

[National Museum of African American History & Culture](#)