

"For though my faith is not yours and your faith is not mine, if we are each free to light our own flame, together we can banish some of the darkness of the world."

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks



www.JewishMonkland.com

FESTIVALS OF LIGHT - Diverse Traditions, Common Themes

Holidays are important events in the lives of our children and families. Whether a holiday is celebrated in a quiet, reverent, spiritual way or in a festive, colorful, gleeful way, such celebrations reflect cultural values, family traditions and, often, religious customs. To ignore holidays altogether is to negate an important part of a child's or a family's heritage. To celebrate one holiday to such an extreme that all others seem trite and abnormal is ignoring the global and religiously diverse population of our communities. Our goal then as educators and community leaders is to explore the cultural, religious and familial traditions of our children and families so that we can create an inclusive atmosphere in which no child, individual or group feels either superior or left out - an atmosphere in which the give and take of sharing personal stories and traditions is natural and culturally sensitive.

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We are opening this year's Festivals of Light program with an ancient Aztec tradition that honors the four elements, including fire, with ceremonies that show the pre-Hispanic link to Las Posadas. It is also our way of acknowledging the presence of the Indigenous Peoples of The Americas that called this place home long before others arrived. We begin with the dance of Tonantzin, the Nahuatl name for the maternal aspect of deities, including Mother Earth and, in more recent times, with ties to the Virgin of Guadalupe. This dance is traditionally done for the Winter Solstice to celebrate the end of the harvest season and the beginning of Panquetzalitzli when the Sun God, Huitzilopochtli, is honored. We then move to the dance of Tonatiuh (a representation of the Sun God) to honor the sun at its weakest point. The birth of the sun god, Huitzilopochtli, was honored on the winter solstice, which continues to be feted in Mexico today on December 12. Fire is an essential part of each one of these ceremonies, as the days become shorter and light becomes diminished in the winter season. The proximity of timing explains the merging of these ancient Aztec solstice traditions and the Christian celebration of Christmas, leading to the widely known festivities of Las Posadas.

Performance by AnaLi Ramirez, Illariy Vitor Gilbert, Charlie Gilbert

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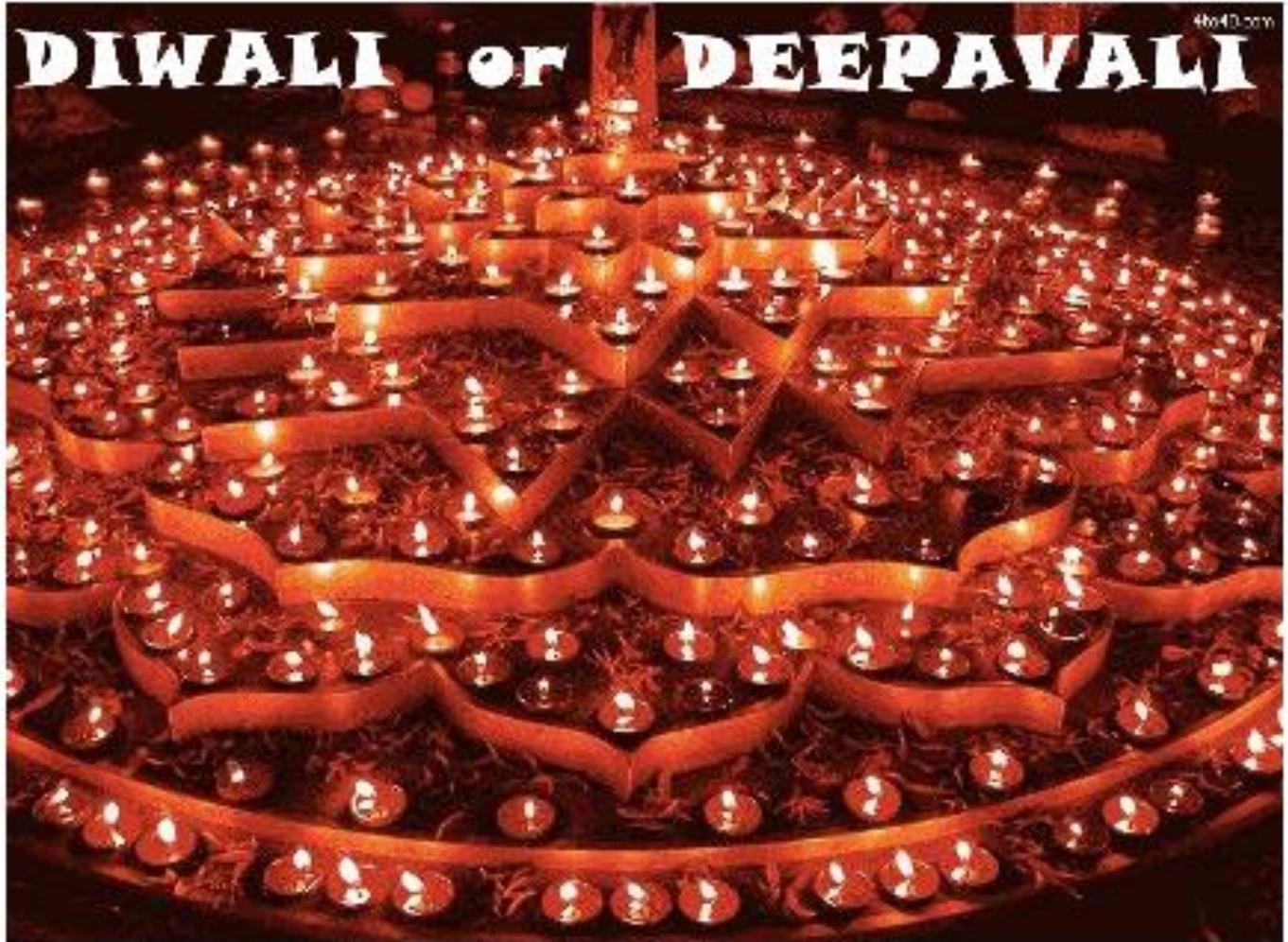
photo from www.tattooofromtheheart.com



Since ancient times, more than 5000 years, the longest, darkest night of the year in the Northern Hemisphere has been a night to celebrate with warmth, fire and candles, music, delicious food, and the last of the fruits from the summer. Watermelon, pomegranates, persimmons, nuts and other fruits, cover the table. Family and friends gather around to eat, laugh, tell stories and jokes, and recite ancient Persian mythology and beloved poetry by Hafez, dispelling the darkness of winter, and welcoming the return of the sun and longer days. Red is the color of Shab-e Yalda, evoking the crimson hues of dawn, and the glow of life. There is a saying in Farsi that goes something like this: *I wish you a long and happy life like Shab-e Yalda, sweet as watermelon and fruitful as pomegranates!*

Performance by Travis Jarrell

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Diwali or Deepavali is a Hindu festival of lights that usually falls in late autumn on the eve of a new moon. In India, it is a national festival and holiday time that is celebrated in many different ways. Homes are decorated with beautiful Rangoli patterns and rows of lights, called diya, to welcome a visit by Lakshmi, the goddess of good fortune and prosperity. Families gather to share festive foods, especially sweets, and often celebrate with dancing and fireworks. Many families also celebrate the homecoming of Prince Rama and Sita from their fourteen-year exile by the evil king, Ravana. Diwali, or Deepavali, is a very festive time for Hindu families around the world as they honor Lakshmi and celebrate the victory of good over evil and light over darkness.

Performance by students of Monica Cooley & Kala Nivedanam

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Many Jewish families around the world celebrate their religious freedom through the celebration of Chanukah or Hanukkah. This glorious festival of lights, which often occurs in December, honors a miracle that occurred over 2000 years ago when the Jewish people were victorious over an invading monarch who tried to force them to give up their faith. The eight nights of Chanukah represent the eight nights for which a few drops of oil miraculously burned in the Etemal Light. Candles are lit each night for eight nights in the family hannakiah, or menorah, to celebrate this miracle and to honor the rededication of the temple or synagogue by the Jewish people. Families celebrate in many different ways, sharing Chanukah prayers as they kindle the lights each night, giving gifts to share their gratitude, eating special treats such as potato latkes and Chanukah gelt and playing games with dreidels, which are spinning tops that say *A great miracle happened here* .

Chanukah sing-along with Cheryl Lane
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The season of Advent represents anticipation of the arrival of Christmas and the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Candles are placed among a wreath of greenery, with one candle lit each Sunday leading up to Christmas. On Christmas Eve, many families light all four candles plus one in the center. For many Christians, Jesus represents the light of the world and everlasting Life, both of which are represented by the Advent candles and the wreath of evergreens. Christmas is celebrated by Christians around the world in many different ways. Some Christians prefer to honor only the spiritual aspects of Christmas and reject the more materialistic traditions. Others choose to celebrate in a festive and visible way with lights, trees, presents and parties.

The Christmas season spans one month:

December 6 - St. Nicholas Day

December 12 - Santa Lucia Day

December 24 - Christmas Eve

December 25 - Christmas Day

January 6 - Three Kings Day or Twelfth Night

**Performances by Helios World Dance Ensemble
and Blue Moves Modern Dance**



Las Posadas is one of many traditions for celebrating Christmas in Mexico and other Latin American countries. It lasts for nine days, from December 16 through 24, and celebrates the re-enactment of Mary and Joseph's search for a safe haven to give birth to Baby Jesus. Posadas traditions include prayer and singing carols and visiting the homes of neighbors with cheerful music and songs for nine days, awaiting the arrival of His birth.

Another tradition is to sing La Rama from the 16th to the 24th of December, the same dates of Las Posadas, and consists of a group of singers who adorn the branch of a tree with candles, mandarins, paper and balloons for their evening procession. With tambourines and maracas they sing verses that make reference to the birth of the Child Jesus, going from house to house waiting in anticipation and showing gratitude with an "aguinaldo" (candies, fruits or money).

Performance by AnaLi Ramirez & Friends
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Ramadan is a special month of fasting and personal introspection for our neighbors who follow the path of Islam. This holy month is honored differently throughout the world, sometimes including the lighting of lanterns and candles, particularly at the close of Ramadan. Based on a lunar calendar, the holy month of Ramadan changes dates each year, beginning with the physical sighting of the new moon. During this holy period of fasting and nightly exploration of the Qur'an, able Muslims refrain from food, liquids and spousal sexual relations from sunrise until sunset. This time of personal sacrifice is designed to heighten self-discipline, self-restraint, a spirit of generosity and love of Allah (God). During the holy month, all thirty sections of the Qur'an are recited by a spiritual leader who has absorbed the entire holy text by heart in the original Arabic. The close of Ramadan is marked by a festive day of celebration known as the Eid al Fitr.

Performance by Reza Filsoofi & Nesrin Simsek
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KWANZAA is a cultural celebration that was started in 1966 by Professor Maulana Karenga. It is an African American holiday which celebrates family, community and culture. Celebrated from December 26 thru January 1, its origins are in the first harvest celebrations of Africa from which it takes its name. The name Kwanzaa is derived from the phrase "matunda ya kwanza" which means "first fruits" in ki-Swahili, one of the most widely spoken African languages. Throughout Kwanzaa, we focus on seven principles, called Nguzo Saba, by which we can live better lives and be better people. Candles are lit each night, shining brightly in the kinara, often accompanied by African music and dance. A Kwanzaa table also has an umoja, or unity, cup; a basket of fruit to represent the harvest; a woven mat placed under the kinara that represents our connection to our ancestors; and ears of corn called vibunzi that represents the children in our midst who will lead us with vision and hope.

Performance by NYAMA Diaspora Ensemble
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Helios World Dance Ensemble sharing a dance for Advent in a previous year

POEMS BY HAFIZ or HAFEZ for Yalda

Your Seed Pouch

Lanterns
 Hang from the night sky
 So that your eye might draw
 One more image of love upon your silk canvas
 Before Sleep

Words from Him have reached you
 And tilled a golden field inside.

When all your desires are distilled
 You will cast just two votes:

To love more,
 And be happy.

Take the sounds from the mouth-flute of Hafiz
 And mix them into your seed pouch

And when the Moon says,
 "It is time to
 Plant."

Why not dance,
 Dance
 and Sing?

The Thousand-Stringed Instrument

The heart is
 The thousand-stringed instrument.

Our sadness and fear come from being
 Out of tune with love.

All day long God coaxes my lips
 to speak.

So that your tears will not stain
 His green dress.

It is not that the Friend is vain,
 It is just your life we care about.

Sometimes the Beloved
 Takes my pen in hand,
 For Hafiz is just a simple man.

The other day the Old One
 Wrote on the Tavern wall;

"The heart is
 The thousand-stringed instrument

That can only be tuned with
 LOVE

THE ARTS - A BRIDGE TO UNDERSTANDING

Over generations throughout the world's many cultures, the arts have endured as vital, vibrant and dynamic necessities in the human desire to express innate creativity and passion for Life and its many traditions and circumstances. The arts have proven themselves to be wonderful teaching tools in the education of our children, especially when introduced at the younger ages. The broad spectrum of the arts includes visual, tactile, auditory and kinetic modes of learning. The arts promote aesthetic awareness and emotional, intellectual and physical development. The participatory nature of using the arts in the classroom, in the community, and in our homes encourages interaction between children and the various mediums of diverse art forms as well as interaction with the various cultural and spiritual elements indigenous to artistic expression. As children are encouraged to express their innate passion and understanding for music, folk tales, literature, poetry, visual art, creative drama, and dance, they are also developing an awareness of and hopefully a respect for the similarities, the differences, and the personal preferences of cultural traditions throughout time. The arts stimulate children to appreciate the inherent beauty within themselves and within the world at large, promoting a global awareness and a respect for all of humanity. The arts have great unifying power as we explore the issues and emotions expressed throughout the ages by all cultures, including those that have no word for art - where art cannot be separated from daily life - where it is a constant expression of a culture's world view - where it is a reflection of human necessity.

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Together we give.



NOVEMBER 28, 2023

UNLEASH GENEROSITY

Generosity gives everyone the power to make a positive change in the lives of others and is a fundamental value anyone can act on.



GIVING TUESDAY MAY BE OVER BUT OUR NEED FOR SUPPORT IS NOT!
There are many ways to support Global, as you can see below. We appreciate any and all assistance of time, talent, and funds.

AND A SHOUT OUT TO TONIGHT'S MANY VOLUNTEERS

How can YOU help Global Education Center?

Donate funds (no gift is too small or too large)

Donate talents

Our beloved home in Northwest Nashville was built in 1894 (4822 Charlotte Avenue) and 1902 (4820 Charlotte). This grand old lady needs some tender loving care. She needs volunteers (and materials):

Carpenters

Electricians

HVAC experts

Plumbers

Painters

Gardeners

Graphic designers



You can also help us by:

Attending events

Promoting our events

Sharing our news

We also need more teaching artists for our work in area schools (paid positions).

