



RELIGIOUS & CULTURAL OBSERVANCES

2023 - 2024



Dear CHCCS,

This document was created with the assistance of various faith leaders, students, families, and staff and organizations from our Chapel Hill-Carrboro community. It is a tool to be used for planning/scheduling and continued learning around major and/or significant religious and cultural observances that may not always be as well-known as others.

Some of the topics included are:



North Carolina for Community and Justice's Interfaith Calendars



Background Information



Celebrated Observances



Religious and Cultural Awareness

and where available:



Additional Resources for Educators

We owe those that took the time to advise us a huge debt of gratitude.

thank you!

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2023 - 2024 Community, Cultural and Religious Dates

Below are occasions which signify community, cultural, and religious dates on the calendar. In an effort to help Chapel Hill – Carrboro City Schools better plan events while respecting important community and faith-based dates, below is a list shared by community leaders, students, families and staff.

* Indicate holidays begin at sunset the evening of the day before the listed date and end at nightfall the day of the holiday. For multi-day holidays, observance begins the night before the first day, and ends after nightfall on the last day of the holiday.

Green denotes Non-working holidays and major holidays in 2023 - 2024 for Abrahamic Faiths:

- September 15 (sundown) - 17 (sundown) — Rosh Hashanah [Judaism]
- September 24 (sundown) - 25 (sundown) — Yom Kippur [Judaism]
- September 29 (sundown) - October 6 (sundown) — Sukkot [Judaism]
- October 6 (sundown) - 7 (sundown) — Shemini Atzeret [Judaism]
- October 7 (sundown) - 8 (sundown) — Simchat Torah [Judaism]
- 2 days that float in Oct./Nov. according to a lunar calculation: Twin Holy Birthdays [Baha'i]
- December 25 — Christmas [Christian]
- January 6 — Epiphany [Protestant, Roman Catholic]
- January 7 — Christmas [Orthodox Christian]
- January 15 — Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday [Federal]
- January 19 — Epiphany [Orthodox Christian]
- March 29 — Good Friday [Protestant, Roman Catholic]
- March 31 — Easter [Protestant, Roman Catholic]
- April 9 (sundown) - 10 (sundown) — Eid al-Fitr [Muslim]
- April 22 (sundown) - April 30 (sundown) — Pesach (Passover) [Judaism]
- May 5 — Pascha/Easter [Orthodox Christian]
- June 11 (sundown) - 13 (sundown) — Shavuot [Judaism]
- June 16 (sundown) - 17 (sundown) — Eid al-Adha [Muslim]
- October 2 (sundown) - 4 (sundown) — Rosh Hashanah [Judaism]
- October 11 (sundown) - 12 (sundown) — Yom Kippur [Judaism]
- October 16 (sundown) - 23 (sundown) — Sukkot [Judaism]
- October 23 (sundown) - 24 (sundown) — Shemini Atzeret [Judaism]
- October 24 (sundown) - 25 (sundown) — Simchat Torah [Judaism]
- December 25 — Christmas [Protestant, Roman Catholic]

Resources:

Interfaith calendars that were used to aid the creation of our community calendar can be accessed at

- [Community Programs - NCCJ](#)
- [Interfaith Calendar](#)
- [Definitions](#)

More information about various faiths can be found by clicking on one below and via the link above.

[Judaism](#) • [Islam](#) • [Buddhist](#) • [Hindu](#) • [Christian](#) • [Baha'i](#) • [Zoroastrian](#) • [Sikh](#) • [Shinto](#) • [Jain](#) •

[Confucian](#) • [Daoist](#) • [Native American](#) • [Materialism](#) • [Secular Humanism](#)

DISCLAIMER: This publication does not include all major religious/cultural holidays. Due to variations in regional and cultural practices and the use of different calendars, some dates of holidays may vary from those listed above.

Baha'i Faith



Background Information

The essence of being a Bahá'í is to love all mankind as one human family and to consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of fellowship. There are no established rituals in the Faith, so each family/community is free to observe and/or celebrate Holy Days in a manner of their choosing, so you're likely to encounter a variety of cultural expressions. Bahá'ís see racial/cultural diversity as a point of strength rather than a cause for conflict. Bahá'ís have been (and continue to be) heavily persecuted in Irán (the birthplace of the Faith) and many other predominantly Muslim countries. The principles of the Faith include: the oneness of mankind, independent investigation of truth, common foundation of all religion, essential harmony of science and religion, equality of women and men, elimination of prejudice of all kinds, universal compulsory education, a spiritual solution to the economic problem, elimination of the extremes of wealth and poverty, a universal auxiliary language, and universal peace upheld by a world government. Bahá'ís have no clergy; administration falls to elected institutions called Spiritual Assemblies, composed of nine individuals chosen annually.



Celebrated Observances

There are a total of 9 Bahá'í Holy Days on which work and school should be suspended.

- Naw-Rúz: March 20 or 21
- Festival of Ridván: April 20 or 21; April 28 or 29, and May 1 or 2
- Declaration of the Báb: May 23 or 24
- Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh: May 28 or 29
- Martyrdom of the Báb: July 9 or 10
- Twin Holy Birthdays: 2 days that float in Oct./Nov. according to a lunar calculation



Religious and Cultural Awareness

- Naw-Rúz (New Year), (coincides with the Spring Equinox each year); "Happy Naw-Rúz!"
- First Day of Ridván (meaning "Paradise" in Arabic) — the most important of the Bahá'í Holy Days. It is the day on which Bahá'u'lláh declared His mission as a Messenger of God in the Garden of Ridván.
- Ninth Day of Ridván, the day on which Bahá'u'lláh's family joined Him in the Garden of Ridván.
- Twelfth Day of Ridván, the day on which Bahá'u'lláh and His family left the garden to travel to Constantinople.

- Declaration of the Báb, the anniversary of the Báb's announcement of His mission in 1844.
- Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, marking the passing of Bahá'u'lláh in 1892.
- Martyrdom of the Báb, who was executed in 1850.
- Birth of the Báb, 1819–1850. The Báb (meaning “Gate” in Arabic) is considered to have paved the way for the incarnation of Bahá'u'lláh, similar to the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. Born in 1819 in Shiraz, Iran, The Báb's mission was to awaken the people to the fact that a new period in human history had begun. He called for spiritual and moral reformation – a revolutionary message in his time.
- Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, 1817–1892. Bahá'u'lláh (meaning “Glory of God” in Arabic) was born in 1817 in Tehran, Iran and established the Bahá'í Faith whose principal teachings are the oneness of humanity, the oneness of religion and the oneness of God. The appearance of Bahá'u'lláh has been likened to a spiritual springtime, destined to spread peace and unity around the globe.
- Ayyám-i-Há (4-5 Intercalary Days), days of spiritual preparation for the Fast, hospitality, charity, and gift giving; "Happy Ayyám-i-Há!"
- The Fast: The last month of the Bahá'í calendar (first three weeks of March) is dedicated to the Bahá'í Fast, in which Bahá'ís between 15 and 70 years of age do not eat or drink from sunrise to sunset and set aside time for prayer and meditation. (there are exemptions for illness, pregnancy, nursing, extended travel, and arduous physical labor)

There are two additional days of significance that appear on the calendar:

- Day of the Covenant, commemorating Bahá'u'lláh's appointment of His son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as the One to whom His followers should turn after His passing.
- Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, marking the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921.

About the Bahá'í Calendar: <https://www.bahai.us/events-calendar/holy-days/>



Additional Resources for Educators

- [Bahá'í World View \(10 min.\): https://youtu.be/vqg-qcadglU](https://youtu.be/vqg-qcadglU)
- <https://www.bahai.us/>
- <https://www.bahai.org/>
- Individual Perspectives on Bahá'í Principles: <https://bahaiteachings.org/>
- The Mandate of Eradicating Racial Prejudice: <https://youtu.be/NaPnNuDrb2Q>
- Children's Resources: <https://brilliantstarmagazine.org/>
- [Books exploring the Bahá'í Faith](#)

Soto Zen Buddhism



Background Information

Soto Zen Buddhism focuses on the practice of zazen, a form of seated meditation, to embody the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha focused on how to relieve suffering by noticing how we create it with delusive thinking. Zen Buddhists work to stay awake to the present moment and to practice mind/body awareness in all activities. We aspire to practice compassion towards all beings and to manifest Buddha's wisdom about the nature of reality which is that all things are impermanent, all things are interconnected, and nirvana is the silencing of all concepts.



Celebrated Observances

- **Buddha's Birthday**, Traditional - April 8, but we usually observe it at the end of April or early in May. We begin with a very short talk directed to the children indoors followed by a procession with the kids through the woods with balloons and bubbles, to an outdoor altar where there is a flower ceremony with chanting and each child pours water over the figure to bathe the Baby Buddha and offers incense.
- **Sejiki Ceremony**, October 31 - The Feeding and Nourishing of Hungry Ghosts. We have the "Hungry Ghost" Ceremony on a weekend evening near Halloween. Instruments are sounded to call up those who are departed but stuck in intermediary realms, as well as to call up the parts of ourselves who are never satisfied with who we are or what we have and to put to rest unresolved issues with the departed. There is chanting and ritualized feeding of the Hungry Ghosts to help them on their way. We also chant the names of those we have done Memorial Services for during the past year. The children are invited to wear costumes.
- **Buddha's Enlightenment** - December 8. We observe this on the Sunday closest to December 8. This begins with a short talk directed to the children and includes chanting while circumambulating the meditation hall with the kids scattering dried flower petals. We have also incorporated candle lighting for the children, and they are given small packets of incense and a candle, and sometimes pansies to take home and plant.
- **New Year's Eve** - December 31. Two periods of meditation, a chanting service of renewal of vows and precepts, followed by a fire ceremony outdoors where we write down habits, relationships, state of mind, etc., that we would like to release. Then we go outdoors and put the papers in a bonfire, along with the memorial cards from the past year, while chanting.



Religious and Cultural Awareness

There are no special greetings at the temple but we often do standing bows as greetings. Different Buddhist denominations have different religious observances. Many Zen Buddhists are vegetarians.



Additional Resources for Educators

- Old Path White Clouds by Thich Nhat Hanh
- Prince Siddhartha by Jonathan Landaw and Janet Brooke
- The Tale of Zen Master Bho Li by Barbara Verkuilen
- The Heart of Buddha's Teaching by Thich Nhat Hanh (for adults)
- Some Jataka Tales: <https://www.motherszone.com/story-time/jataka-tales>

Won Buddhism



Background Information

Won Buddhism originated in Korea in 1916 when its founder, Venerable Sotaesan (Park, Joongbin 1891-1943), experienced a great enlightenment. He envisioned a practice for all people that emphasized equality between clergy and laity, between women and men, and among all economic classes and races. Sotaesan foresaw the emergence of modern materialism, thus he emphasized “a balance between material and spiritual power” as a founding motive of Won Buddhism.

Different Buddhist denominations have different religious observances.



Celebrated Observances

- **New Year Celebration Service** (January 1st at 11 a.m.)
- **Great Enlightenment Day Service** (the nearest Sunday to April 28th, at 10 a.m.). April 28th is the holiday for commemorating the Founding Master Sotaesan’s Great Enlightenment after over twenty years of truth-seeking. It is also the day of celebrating the founding of Won- Buddhism and the common birthday of all Won-Buddhists, and hence is the day of origin for the Won Buddhist Community.
- **Memorial Service** (the last Sunday in May, at 10 a.m., the day before Memorial Day) The Memorial Service is observed to honor the memory of the Founding Master, all sages, and lay or ordained Won-Buddhist members who passed away. And in this joint memorial service, we also offer prayers for our ancestors, family members, and all sentient beings.
- **Spiritual Thanksgiving Service** (Sunday following Thanksgiving at 10 a.m.)



Religious and Cultural Awareness

Sitting meditation is the foundation of the practice. In traditional teaching, beginning meditators are asked to concentrate on three techniques in their practice: achieving proper posture, maintaining awareness of breath, and quieting the mind.

Chanting meditation helps to focus the mind by reciting a simple phrase or sutra. Because the mind of a beginning meditator is not settled, chanting meditation is a very efficient method to calm the mind. We chant in both Korean and English, and you are welcome to chant whatever you're comfortable with. Chants we use in our programs include the Il-Won-Sang Vow, the Heart Sutra, “*We Are One, We Are Whole*,” and “*Na-Mu-Ah-Mi-Tah-Bul*,” which means to return to Ami-Ta Buddha, our true nature within.

Moving meditation is a practice accessible to all. In this practice, we do not see the mind and body as separate. Moving meditation helps us get out of our heads and prepare our bodies for seated meditation. When the body is changed through moving meditation, there is a change in one's *chi* energy, improving the balance and harmony of our bodies.



Additional Resources for Educators

- [Won Buddhism of North Carolina](#)

Christianity

Catholic



Background Information

The Catholic tradition is sacramental, and thus in a sense physical. Our physical presence among the community of believers as we celebrate the Mass is important. The touch of the priest holding bread that will be consecrated to become the Body of Christ. The smell of incense, the sound of bells. The sprinkling of Holy (blessed) Water. All of this physicality puts us in relationship with Jesus Christ, who Himself experienced presence in synagogues, touch as He healed, and so forth.



Celebrated Observances

- **Christmas**, December 25, celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ.
- The season of **Lent** begins with Ash Wednesday, 46 days before Easter.
- **Our Lady of Guadalupe**: the feast day is December 12, but the celebration begins the evening before.



Religious and Cultural Awareness

For Catholics, the Christmas liturgical season extends from Dec. 25, through the Epiphany (January 6) to the following Sunday when we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. Our common greeting is Merry Christmas.

Lent is a season of penitence when we consider our relationship with God and neighbor and strive to repair any brokenness in those relationships. For those preparing to join the Catholic Church at Easter, Lent is a time of final spiritual preparation and commitment. On Ash Wednesday, ashes are applied to our heads as a sign of repentance, our desire to move away from sin and toward our God. Lent is a period of self-denial, including not eating meat on Fridays, and the tradition of giving up something that on its own is good in our lives, so that our focus is kept more and more on God and our relationship and service to God and neighbor. There are various special times of prayer that are practiced, such as communal recitation of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, the praying of the Stations of the Cross, and the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession).

Particularly in the Hispanic community, the celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe is of great importance. This feast day is December 12, but the celebration begins the evening before with prayers, songs, and sharing of hot chocolate. On the feast day, we celebrate Mass followed by a fiesta. This feast commemorates the series of appearances of the Blessed Virgin Mary to a Mexican peasant named Juan Diego in 1531. She asked that a church be

built on a hill called Tepeyac in Mexico, but the archbishop asked for a sign that the apparition was real. The Blessed Mother instructed Juan Diego to pick roses from the hill, despite the fact that it was December and the hill should be barren. Juan Diego found the roses and carried them in his cloak to the archbishop. When he opened the cloak and the roses fell out, the cloak was found to have an image of Our Lady emblazoned on it. This image is among the most revered in the Catholic tradition.

Christianity

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints



Background Information

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints consider themselves Christians. There are many misunderstandings about the faith and beliefs. Most members are happy to answer any questions or misconceptions about our traditions and beliefs.

Core beliefs include:

- As a unique child of God, you are loved immensely by your Heavenly Father.
- We need Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God and our loving Savior.
- You were born for a reason. Life can be difficult sometimes, but we are here to find happiness and help others do the same.
- One of the most important ways we can learn about Jesus Christ is to study the scriptures that testify of Him.
- We all have the capacity to be more Christlike in our thoughts and actions.
- Jesus Christ knew that as we followed Him, we'd need each other's help. That's why He established His Church to provide guidance, fellowship, and support.¹



Celebrated Observances

- Traditional Christian holidays like **Easter**, and **Christmas** are important to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. These days are spent with family celebrating the life of Jesus Christ.
- July 24 is known as **Pioneer day**. This day celebrates the arrival of Latter-Day Saint pioneers entering the Salt Lake valley in 1847. Nothing particular is done other than an occasional event organized by a local congregation.



Religious and Cultural Awareness

Sundays are sacred days for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Members strive to make it holy by refraining from everyday activities and instead devote time with their families, attending church services and serving their neighbors.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, although often informally known as the LDS Church or Mormon Church, is now asking to be referred by the full name of the church: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.



Additional Resources for Educators

[Learn more about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saint](#)

¹ <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/?lang=eng>

Christianity

Non-Denomination



Background Information

A non-denominational church is a Christian church that holds no connection with the recognized denominations and mainline churches such as the Baptist, Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran, or Methodist churches. Church denominations are larger organizations that hold a particular identity, set of beliefs, and traditions. In denominational churches, the broader organization may set forth directives on leadership structures, membership, and dogma. In non-denominational churches, each church makes decisions on various parts of church life for itself.²



Celebrated Observances

- Many non-denominational churches celebrate the major Christian holidays.



Religious and Cultural Awareness

Each church makes its own decisions about worship, beliefs and church life, and it is important to get to know an individual church's belief system.



Additional Resources for Educators

- [*The Complete Guide to Christian Denominations: Understanding the History, Beliefs, and Differences. Updated and Expanded*](#)

² [Non-Denominational Churches Explained](#)
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Christianity

Baptist



Background Information

In America, a former member of the Church of England, Roger Williams, separated from officials in the Massachusetts Bay Colony over his belief about church functions. In 1638, he founded the first Baptist church in America in uncolonized Rhode Island.

Baptist churches are broken up into different sub-denominations. In the United States, the largest group is made up of the Southern Baptist Convention. As of 2015, the group was made up of more than 15 million members.

The main belief in the Baptist church is Baptism. The Baptist church believes in Baptism only after a person has professed Christ as their Savior. Baptists are traditionally strong believers in Biblical authority. Since the origins of the church, Baptists have said the Bible is the only authority for Christian faith and practice. Baptists also believe in religious liberty for all. ³



Celebrated Observances

- Good Friday
- Easter Sunday
- Thanksgiving
- Christmas
- Other major Christian Holidays and Celebrations



Religious and Cultural Awareness

It is important to note that Baptists are not distinguished by one particular belief, such as baptism; rather, an entire set of beliefs comprise what Baptists hold together as their denominational distinctives. This set of beliefs includes the Bible as the ultimate authority in matters of faith and practice, a regenerate church comprised of baptized believers, recognition of the autonomy of the local church, and religious liberty for all.⁴



Additional Resources for Educators

- [*The Complete Guide to Christian Denominations: Understanding the History, Beliefs, and Differences, Updated and Expanded*](#)

³ [What to know about Baptists](#)

⁴ [Baptist Theology, An Essay by Anthony L Chute](#)
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Hinduism



Background Information

Hinduism is the world's oldest religion, according to many scholars, with roots and customs dating back more than 4,000 years. Today, with about 900 million followers, Hinduism is the third-largest religion behind Christianity and Islam. Roughly 95 percent of the world's Hindus live in India. Because the religion has no specific founder, it's difficult to trace its origins and history. Hinduism is unique in that it's not a single religion but a compilation of many traditions and philosophies.

Hinduism embraces many religious ideas. For this reason, it's sometimes referred to as a "way of life" or a "family of religions," as opposed to a single, organized religion. Most forms of Hinduism are henotheistic, which means they worship a single deity, known as "Brahman," but still recognize other gods and goddesses. Followers believe there are multiple paths to reaching their god.⁵



Celebrated Observances

- Saraswati Puja (worshiping the goddess of education in February)
- Durga Puja (goddess of spiritual and moral strength)
- Diwali: the festival of lights
- Navaratri: a celebration of fertility and harvest
- Holi: a spring festival
- Krishna Janmashtami: a tribute to Krishna's birthday
- Raksha Bandhan: a celebration of the bond between brother and sister
- Maha Shivaratri: the great festival of Shiva



Religious and Cultural Awareness

Hindu worship, which is known as "puja," typically takes place in the Mandir (temple). Followers of Hinduism can visit the Mandir any time they please.

Hindus can also worship at home, and many have a special shrine dedicated to certain gods and goddesses.

The giving of offerings is an important part of Hindu worship. It's a common practice to present gifts, such as flowers or oils, to a god or goddess.

⁵ [Hinduism Beliefs](#)
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Islam

Sunni



Background Information

Islam is the second largest religion in the world after Christianity, with about 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide. Although its roots go back further, scholars typically date the creation of Islam to the 7th century, making it the youngest of the major world religions. Islam started in Mecca, in modern-day Saudi Arabia, during the time of the prophet Muhammad's life. Today, the faith is spreading rapidly throughout the world.

When Muhammad died, there was debate over who should replace him as leader. This led to a schism in Islam, and two major sects emerged: the Sunnis and the Shiites (Shi'a).

Sunnis make up nearly 90 percent of Muslims worldwide. They accept that the first four caliphs were the true successors to Muhammad.

Shiite Muslims believe that only the caliph Ali and his descendants are the real successors to Muhammad. They deny the legitimacy of the first three caliphs. Today, Shiite Muslims have a considerable presence in Iran, Iraq, and Syria.⁶



Celebrated Observances

- **Ramadhaan** [commonly spelled Ramadan]: Fasting from food and water from dawn to sunset; students may need alternatives to some physical activities during gym/PE, for example.
 - *Greeting*: Ramadhaan (pronounced "Rama-dhaan") Mubaarak (each "a" or "aa" is pronounced similar to the first "a" in "balsamic" [vinegar], and "dh" is pronounced as a soft d sound with the tongue flat and lips rounded).
- **'Eid al-Fitr**: Holiday the day after Ramadhaan ends; no fasting but congregational prayer and gatherings due to which students may miss school.
 - *Greeting*: 'Eid Mubaarak ("aa" is pronounced elongated similar to the first "a" in "balsamic" [vinegar])
- **Day of 'Arafah**: The day before 'Eid al-Adhhaa; many may be fasting on this day and may need accommodations for physical activities or whatever may make them thirsty or hungry.
- **'Eid al-Adhhaa** [commonly spelled Eid al-Adha]: This is the 10th day of the lunar month within which the pilgrimage takes place; this day is the ending of the pilgrimage; congregational prayers and gatherings due to which students may miss school.

⁶[Learning about Islam](#)

- **Day of 'Aashuura** [commonly spelled Ashura]: The day Moses and his people were saved from the Pharaoh; Muslims typically fast this day and either the day after or the day before, so physical activity considerations are needed
- Shi'a Only:
 - **Days of Mourning** due to the martyrdom of Hussain ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (may peace, blessings and mercy of God be upon him and his family and companions)



Religious and Cultural Awareness

Sunni + Shi'a: Days off request is for the two days of 'Eid (al-Fitr and al-Adha); other days are for consideration of activities and awareness of important religious events/times

Muslim places of worship are accessible for guided tours, including as part of field trips, and religious leaders may be reached for any questions without questioners needing to be worried about offending anyone.

Muslim places of worship are open and do not require denominational membership, so the average Muslim may be found praying at the nearest mosque instead of particular ones only, and there is collaboration between Muslim organizations such that the setup is generally more as a Muslim community as opposed to a Muslim organization (separated by membership requirements, etc.). Teachers should reflect this reality in the lessons as opposed to presenting each local Muslim population as disparate relative to those in other localities in terms. It is common for Muslims to travel to other parts of the country or world and visit any mosque (though usually there is some difference between Sunni vs. Shi'ah setups and prayer formats) and greet anyone with the common greeting of "peace be upon you" and feel at home.

Judaism



Background Information

Judaism, the oldest of the three monotheistic faiths, is the religion and way of life of the Jewish people. The basic tenets of Judaism are derived from the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, and a rich history of rabbinic interpretation.

The most important teaching and tenet of Judaism is that there is one God, incorporeal and eternal. We are to reflect God's presence by living lives of loving kindness, justice, and compassion. All people are created in the image of God and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.



Celebrated Observances

Jewish holidays are observed based on the Hebrew Calendar. The Hebrew Calendar is based on lunar months. This means that holidays may change dates year-to-year but will still be in the same general season or time of year. All Jewish holidays are observed starting at sunset the night before and end at nightfall the day of the holiday. For multi-day holidays the holiday begins the night that leads into the first day, and ends after nightfall on the last day of the holiday.

- **Shabbat** is the weekly day of rest in the Jewish calendar. Shabbat begins at sundown on Friday and lasts until three stars are seen in the sky on Saturday evening. During this holy day of rest, practitioners appreciate God's creation and being with family and friends in worship and celebration. Jews are commanded to cease work and rest on Shabbat because God ceased work and rested after creating for six days.
 - *Customs:* Friday evening meal with family and friends, Services in synagogue Friday night and Shabbat morning, ceasing from all work, including using electronics. Sabbath observant students cannot do school work or attend many school functions that are held on Friday night and Saturday.
 - *Greetings:* Every Friday it is customary to say "Shabbat Shalom."
 - *Time of Year* – Every week of the year!
- **Rosh Hashanah**, The Jewish new year, is both a time of rejoicing and of serious introspection, a time to celebrate the completion of another year while also taking stock of one's life. The two days of Rosh Hashanah usher in the Ten Days of Repentance also known as the Days of Awe, which culminate in the major fast day of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On Rosh Hashanah and the month leading up to the Holiday, we blow the shofar, a ram's horn that makes a trumpet-like sound. The shofar is like a "wake up" call" to help us focus intensely on Teshuvah – repentance -- returning to our highest selves, turning to others to ask for and grant forgiveness, and turning to God in compassion.

- *Greetings* for Rosh Hashanah: L'shanah Tovah
- *Customs*: Festive meals, communal prayer in the evening as well in the morning lasting into early afternoon, doing no work, hearing the shofar, and eating apples dipped in honey to represent a sweet New Year.
- **Yom Kippur**, a day of collective confession, fasting, and prayer is the most solemn and sacred day of the Jewish calendar. It is called the "Sabbath of Sabbaths" and all forms of work (except that involved in saving a life) are prohibited on this day. The fast of Yom Kippur begins in the evening and lasts 25 hours. It is a complete fast from all food and drink. Prayer services begin in the evening, resume the next morning and last all day into the evening. Students observing Yom Kippur will not attend school or be able to do any schoolwork on that day.
 - *Customs*: Fasting from all food and drink, communal prayer, turning to others to ask for and grant forgiveness, turning to God for forgiveness.
 - *Greetings*: May you have a meaningful Fast or May you have a meaningful Yom Kippur
 - G'mar chatimah Tovah (May you have a good sealing in the Book of Life).
- **Sukkot** An eight-day Jewish festival of Sukkot (booths (or tabernacles) and the fall harvest. The name Sukkot 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. The Eighth Day (*Shmini 'Atzeret*) is considered both the end of Sukkot and a distinct festival.
 - *Customs*: Thanksgiving for God's presence in creation and God's protection, Building and decorating a Sukkah (or hut), Welcoming guests for festive meals in Sukkah traditionally observant Jews do not work on the first two and last two days of the holiday.
 - *Greeting*: Chag Sameach!
 - *Time of Year*: Sukkot falls in autumn, after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.
- **Simchat Torah** Jews read the whole Torah (the sacred scroll which holds the 5 Books of Moses written in Hebrew) over an entire year. Simchat Torah is a Joyous festival in which the annual cycle of the reading of the Torah in the synagogue is completed and its first book begun again. Depending on the denomination of Judaism, Simchat Torah is celebrated on the evening leading into the first or second day of Shemini 'Atzeret. Traditionally observant Jews do not work on these days.
 - *Customs*: Singing, dancing, and rejoicing with Torah scrolls. Communal blessing of children
 - *Greeting*: Chag Sameach
 - *Time of Year*: Mid-Autumn

- **Hannukah**, The Feast of Lights (Feast of Dedication), is celebrated for eight days to commemorate the rededication of the Temple following the Jews' victory over occupying forces in 165 BCE, which re-established for a time their religious and political freedom. Legend has it that when the Temple was rededicated, a small amount of oil expected to burn for only a short time lasted eight nights which is why Hannukah is celebrated for 8 days. Hannukah is actually a minor holiday which has gained importance in America due to its proximity to Christmas.
 - *Customs*: Lighting Menorah each night, singing songs, eating food fried in oil (like jelly doughnuts, latkes (fried potato pancakes)), playing dreidel (Jewish top)
 - *Greeting*: Happy Hannukah
 - *Time of Year*: late Autumn or early winter, depending on the Jewish calendar for that year.

- **Passover** or Pesach in Hebrew, commemorates the Exodus from Egypt. The main themes of Passover are freedom, redemption and the obligation to fight oppression in our own time. Centered on the family or communal celebration of the Seder (ritual meal), Passover is one of the most beloved and widely observed of all Jewish holidays.

Because the Israelites had no time to let their bread rise as they hurriedly left Egypt, Jewish tradition forbids eating (or even possessing) any food that contains leavened grains. While Seders are held on the first two nights of the Holiday, Passover lasts for eight full days. During that time no leavened foods (chametz) are eaten.

 - *Customs*: Holding a Seder with family, friends and community to tell the story of the Exodus and Redemption the first two evenings of the Festival. Not eating anything with leavened grains. Eating Matzah – the unleavened bread that reminds us of our oppression and our redemption and our obligation to feed the hungry.
 - *Greetings*: Happy Passover, Chag Pesach Sameach v'Kasher (to a joyous and Kosher Passover)
 - Passover 2023 begins the evening of April 5 and ends the evening of April 13th.

- **Shavuot (Or "Feast of Weeks.")** Shavuot is (a two-day Festival) and marks the conclusion of the seven weeks following Pesach (Passover). It is a celebration of the harvest of first fruits and commemorates the giving of the Torah and Commandments to Moses and the Jews at Mount Sinai.
 - *Customs*: All-night communal study (Tikkun Leil Shavuot) to prepare for revelation of the Torah. At services in the morning, the Ten commandments and the Book of Ruth from the Torah are read. Reform synagogues may have 10th graders participate in a confirmation ceremony to affirm their ongoing learning and commitment to Jewish tradition. Traditionally observant Jews do not work on these days.

- *Greeting:* Chag Sameach!
- *Time of Year:* Late Spring/early summer



Religious and Cultural Awareness

The rise of white Nationalism (which has at its animating core anti-Semitism), attacks against the Jewish community (currently the greatest target of violent religious hate crimes), and the scapegoating of the Jews by elected officials are all troubling reminders that anti-Semitism is very real in American culture. This reality has an impact on Jewish students.

Teachers should endeavor to be sensitive to this reality when presenting information about Hitler, World War II and the Holocaust. Also, information about Judaism should go beyond this dark time in Jewish history and point to the resilience of the Jewish people and the positive contributions of the Jewish people to society.



Additional Resources for Educators

[Anti-Defamation League Resources](#)

Sikhism



Background Information

Sikh Faith originates from India, and is a small minority in every country, including India itself (Sikhs are less than 2% of total Indian population).

In the Sikh Faith it is believed that Church and State should be separate! BUT if prayer from one faith group is allowed then all should be allowed.

Primary Sikh teaching is to regard all human beings equally; therefore, an observant Sikh will treat all of his/her classmates with equal regard no matter what their background.



Celebrated Observances

- **Vaisakhi:** April 14 - 15. On this day (original dates are March 27, 1469 and March 30th, 1699) our First Guru, the founder of the Sikh Faith, was born. His name was Guru Nanak. Then in 1699, on Guru Nanak's Birth, our 10th Guru created/revealed a "nation" called the Khalsa in an elaborate ceremony. The Khalsa represents all the values that Guru Nanak taught his followers. We refer to the day as Vaisakhi Day or Khalsa Day. The shift in dates over the years is due to the miss-match of western and Indian calendars. There are no particular rituals; however, we celebrate this day with gatherings at local Gurudwaras or families as time and schedules permit.
- **Martyrdom (Shahidi) of Guru Arjan Dev Ji** - June 16th. In 1606, our 5th Guru was tortured to death for not accepting the ruling faith, Islam. We celebrate this each summer to remind ourselves to be faithful to our principles and our own identity. The issue isn't about one faith against another but about the right to worship the way you choose - Freedom of Religion! Once again there are no rituals other than to gather as a congregation.
- **Coronation of Guru Granth Saheb Ji as the Guru** - Oct 20. In Sikh faith, Word is the Guru - the savior, messiah, prophet, God, all rolled into one! "Granth" is a text, a book. The words of our Gurus were written by them and our 10th Guru compiled all of the writings into one final volume. The Granth was entitled as our Guru on Oct 20 1708. From that day onwards, we take our guidance from Guru Granth, our eternal Guru.



Religious and Cultural Awareness

Sikhs do not cut hair, students will often have long hair wrapped into a turban. They have a distinct appearance which often can lead to hurtful remarks. Men and women who serve in the military or law enforcement often have to request exemptions. Chapel Hill Police Department currently has a Sikh police officer.

Many Sikhs are vegetarians – however, many are not. Eggs are also often off the menu.