

## Religions Around the World Patch



### To earn the Religions of the World patch: (all grade levels must complete activity #2)

Girl Scout Daisy:	Complete <b>5</b> activities
Girl Scout Brownie:	Complete <b>6</b> activities
Girl Scout Junior:	Complete <b>7</b> activities
Girl Scout Cadette:	Complete <b>8</b> activities
Girl Scout Senior:	Complete <b>9</b> activities
Girl Scout Ambassador:	Complete <b>9</b> activities

Historically, Girl Scouting has been committed to diversity and a rich tapestry of religious beliefs is reflected in the Girl Scout membership. Our organization continues to be enriched by members of all faith groups. Through the Religions Around the World patch program, girls will participate in activities that explore the beliefs and practices of several of the world's religions. Although it is not comprehensive, the patch program can serve as a great starting point for girls to Discover more about their own faith and beliefs, Connect with other girls and community members of different faiths, and Take Action to encourage others to have a better understanding of the world's religions. Information is included to help you guide girls through some of the activities required for earning the patch. Additional resources are recommended below. The Resource Center also has books regarding different religious faiths and information.

**Note to Troop Leaders:** Religious information is considered a sensitive issue. Be sure that families are aware of the activities the troop is conducting. It is recommended that a Sensitive Issues permission slip is completed before working on this patch program. Sensitive Issues permission slips are located in the Resource Center or at <http://www.girlscouts-swtx.org/gssa/Forms.asp?SnID=1450293616>

### Recommended Resources:

[www.academicinfo.net/religindex.html](http://www.academicinfo.net/religindex.html)  
[www.buddhanet.net/mag\\_kids.htm](http://www.buddhanet.net/mag_kids.htm)  
[www.livingdharma.org](http://www.livingdharma.org)  
[www.myjewishlearning.com](http://www.myjewishlearning.com)  
[www.religion-online.org](http://www.religion-online.org)  
[www.UnderstandingPrejudice.org](http://www.UnderstandingPrejudice.org)  
[www.youthandreligion.com](http://www.youthandreligion.com)

[www.worldalmanacforkids.com](http://www.worldalmanacforkids.com)  
[www.uri.org/kids](http://www.uri.org/kids)  
[www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/cultural/religion/](http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/cultural/religion/)  
[www.bahai.org/](http://www.bahai.org/)  
[campus.fortunecity.com/caltech/531/kids.html](http://campus.fortunecity.com/caltech/531/kids.html)  
[www.imagiverse.org/activities/religions/](http://www.imagiverse.org/activities/religions/)

## GSSWT RELIGIONS AROUND THE WORLD PATCH ACTIVITIES

- 1) **Talk to two people who practice a religion different from yours. Discuss some things that are the same and different between your practices and theirs.**
  - ◆ Identify a common theme(s) between the different religions.
  - ◆ How can learning about different religions help you appreciate differences in others?
  - ◆ Think about and discuss ways that religious customs have had an impact on local culture, families, the community, etc.
- ☆2) **Attend a service, ceremony or celebration for a religion that is different from yours.**

*The Spring Program/Training Guide lists several Girl Scout Sunday/Sabbath events during the month of March. You may choose to attend one of these events. You can also visit a church service of a friend who practices a different faith than your own, or something else you or your troop decides.*

- 3) **Research information about a religious holiday that is different from yours. Complete one activity related to that holiday such as make a craft or learn a song.**
- 4) **Learn about one of the following traditions or activities. Find out what faith(s) participate in the activity or tradition you chose and discover how the activity relates to the faith that practices or celebrates that tradition?**
  - Ritual Walking
  - Burning of Incense
  - Meditation
  - Deity Offerings
  - Tattooing
  - Ritual Dress
  - Prayer Flags (or other types of prayer aides)
  - Offerings to ancestors
- 5) **What does it mean to say grace (a blessing over food)? Are all blessings sung? Are there different times during a meal when a blessing might be said? Discover how 3 different religions bless their food.**
- 6) **Go for it with food! Many faiths have food traditions and/or dietary restrictions. Learn about some of these traditions and create a snack or meal around the food traditions of one religious group.**
- 7) **Create a calendar that lists as many religious holidays, from at least 3 religious traditions, that you can find.**
- 8) **Research religious recognitions at P.R.A.Y's web site [www.praypub.org](http://www.praypub.org). Find out if there is a special Girl Scout award for your religion.**

*Girl Scouts of Southwest Texas often sponsors "Interfaith Day of Discovery" a program listed in the Program/Training Guide. You may choose to attend one of these programs to find out more about the religious awards of your faith or research the awards on your own.*
- 9) **Candles are used in Girl Scout ceremonies and in many religious ceremonies. Find two religions that use candles and describe why candles are used. Consider making candles for use in your troop's Scouts Own ceremonies.**
- 10) **In the Hindu tradition there are 7 schools of yoga, each uses a different technique. Explore one yoga technique.**
- 11) **Help organize and/or attend an event to promote world peace and religious tolerance. Invite all denominations to participate. (This activity is highly encouraged for Girl Scout Seniors and Ambassadors.)**
- 12) **Find out the many names for God from various religious perspectives. Why might there be so many names?**
- 13) **What role does dance play in different faiths? Learn a dance from a different religion or other tradition than your own.**
- 14) **A koan ('kō-än) is a puzzling, often paradoxical statement or story, used in Zen Buddhism as an aid to meditation and a means of gaining spiritual awakening. One famous koan is, "Two hands clap and there is a sound; what is the sound of one hand?" Learn more about koans and try writing one yourself.**

- 15) **Some people choose a career within a religion. Select one religion and find out what careers are available. Try to interview someone who has chosen a career within a faith community. Find out how they came to choose their career? Find out the qualifications, education and/or training necessary for the career.**
- 16) **What does the Girl Scout Promise mean to you when it says “to serve God?” Write a journal entry or plan a Scouts Own based upon your reflections.**
- 17) **What is the *Blessings of the 4 corners of the Earth* found in Some Native American Traditions?**
- 18) **Identify on a map at least 3 Holy or Sacred sites from at least 2 different religions.**
- 19) **Research, identify, and compare symbols of different religions. *Girl Scout Daisies should find 3 symbols, Brownies and Juniors 5 symbols, Cadettes 7 symbols, Seniors and Ambassadors 10 symbols.***
  - ♦ What is similar or different about the symbols?
  - ♦ Do the symbols have any similar or shared meanings?
  - ♦ How did the symbol come to be represented in the faith?
- 20) **Some religions follow a lunar calendar and others follow a solar calendar. Find out the difference between a lunar and solar calendar and identify one religion that uses each calendar.**
- 21) **Think about and discuss ways that religious customs have had an impact on local culture, the arts, the environment, medicine, politics, etc. (*This activity is highly encouraged for Girl Scout Cadettes, Seniors and Ambassadors.*)**
- 22) **What holiday traditions does your family celebrate? Do they relate to your faith?**
- 23) **Helping others, feeding the homeless or taking care of sick people are common concepts in many religions. In your own tradition, how do you respond and reach out to others? With your family, plan and take action on a project that puts your faith into action. (*For example; adopt a family at the holidays, volunteer in a soup kitchen, or make cards for people in the hospital. Contact your own faith institution for ideas and activities that benefit the community.*)**
- 24) **Research at least one example of a war fought on religious grounds. Reflect upon how religious differences can result in conflict and how you can play a part to educate and understand the differences that make us all unique. (*This activity is highly encouraged for Girl Scout Seniors and Ambassadors.*)**

For information such as price, availability, etc. or to order patches, contact the Girl Scouts of Southwest Texas Council Shop in San Antonio at (210) 349-2404 or (800) 580-7247, extension 244. Six weeks advance notice required for orders of 100 or more patches.

# Overview of Religious Observances & Holidays

*Excerpts from All In Good Faith, GSUSA 2003*

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## BAHA'I

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In the mid 1800's a young Persian named Mirza Ali Muhammed, "The Bab," had a revelation of a new religion based on the ideas of universal unity and peace in the world. His appointed follower BAHU-U-LLAH ("The Glory of God") developed and spread his ideas, and wrote many books on how to accomplish this ideal of universal religion, government and language, including KITAB-al-AQDAS ("The Most Holy Book"). Baha'i's oppose war and prejudice of every kind, worship one God, work for the elimination of poverty and injustice everywhere, and insist on the equality of all people.

The Nineteen-Day Feast is the most important Baha'I event. Every 19 days, the whole community gathers to worship, discuss community concerns, and share a meal together. Adults and Children attend, and everyone is encouraged to share her or his ideas.

Baha'i has spread throughout the world, with the strongest concentration in the Middle East. A main center in the United States is Willmette, Illinois. [www.Bshai.org](http://www.Bshai.org)

### Baha'i Holidays

- Naw-Ruz (Baha'I New Year)
- Feast of Ridvan
- Anniversary of the Declaration of Bab
- Anniversary of the Ascension of Baha'u'llah
- Anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Bab
- Anniversary of the birth of Bab
- Anniversary of the birth of Baha'u'llah
- Day of the Covenant
- Anniversary of the Ascension of Abdu'i-Baha

## BUDDHISM

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Siddhartha Gautama was a prince who lived in Nepal 2500 years ago. He wanted to find a way to stop suffering in the world and also to discover how people could enter "Nirvana" (a state of no fear or suffering) when they died. He left home and meditated for seven years and strove for enlightenment. He became a "Buddha." For 40 years he taught people the Four Noble Truths and the Eight-fold path, an ethical and moral way of life. Buddhists practice meditation. Statues of Gautama, another name for the Buddha, are prominent in their temples, where offerings of incense, flowers, and fruit honor Buddha's life and teachings.

Buddhists vow to uphold the FIVE PRECEPTS, which include not lying, not stealing, and not killing. Some Buddhists (including most Buddhists in the U.S.A.) believe in Amida, a vow Buddha took that he would not enter Nirvana until every other person had gone in. Zen Buddhism, from Japan, has become very popular in the United States. In Zen Meditation people seek to calm their minds and become peaceful. Tibetan Buddhism headed by the Dalai Lama is noted for its colorful festivals and parades.

Buddhist monks shave their heads and wear robes of orange, brown, maroon, or gray. Buddhists take off their shoes before going into their churches or temples.

### Important Buddhist Holidays include:

Wesak, which honors the birth of the Buddha (its celebration includes washing a "baby" Buddha, and offering flowers and incense), and Buddha Day, on the first full moon in May. Parades and feasting mark holidays such as Buddha's birth, Enlightenment, and his entry into Nirvana at death.

### Other Buddhist Holidays:

- Nirvana Day or Nehan E in Japanese
- Hanamatsuri Day
- Bodhi Day
- Buddha Day

## CHRISTIANITY

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Many denominations define themselves as Christian. They share a common belief in Jesus Christ as the son of God and savior of humanity. Jesus lived and taught in what is Israel today. He attracted a band of followers, twelve of whom are known as "disciples." These men traveled to many countries spreading Jesus' teachings. Some of the most well-known are "Love your neighbor as well as you love yourself" and "Do to others as you would want them to do to you."

Christians often become official members of their church through baptism with or in water and through a confirmation ceremony. The Christian Bible has two parts – an Old Testament consisting of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament consisting of the writings about Jesus.

Christians exist worldwide. Easter Sunday is the most important Christian holy day. It celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christmas, or the nativity of Our Lord is celebrated on December 25<sup>th</sup> and commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ.

### Christian Holidays:

- **Ascension Day: 10 days before Pentecost**
- **Ash Wednesday**
- **Corpus Christi: 11 days after Pentecost**
- **Easter Sunday**
- **First Sunday in Advent: four weeks before the Nativity**
- **Good Friday: 2 days before Easter**
- **Holy Saturday: 1 day before Easter**
- **Maundy Thursday: 3 days before Easter**
- **Nativity: December 25**
- **Palm Sunday: 7 days before Easter**
- **Pentecost**
- **Shrove Tuesday: 1 day before Ash Wednesday**
- **Trinity Sunday: 7 days after Pentecost**

### Baptist:

Baptists are Christians who share a unique faith. Baptists believe that:

- The Bible is the Word of God and the sole authority for faith and practice
- God calls us directly as individuals. Believers accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior, and are guided by the Holy Spirit
- Each church is self-governing, people come into the church as adults or youth believers, not as infants

### Eastern Orthodox:

Since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Christian Orthodox churches have thrived primarily in the East, including countries in Eastern Europe, Greece, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Armenia, and Russia. Although central tenants of each group are similar, customs vary according to cultural and geographic factors. Many of the holidays are the same as those listed under Christian Holidays, though the ones listed below are celebrated on different days of the year.

- **Great lent**
- **Pascha (Easter)**
- **Ascension**
- **Pentecost**

### Episcopal:

The Episcopal Church is a member of the Anglican Communion, derived from the Church of England and shares with it traditions of faith and order as set forth in its Book of Common Prayer. An Episcopalian is a person who belongs to the Episcopal Church. "Episcopal means "governed by bishops."

There are 3 basic sources of Episcopal Church beliefs:

- Holy Scripture (the primary source of doctrine)
- Reason (gifts of the Holy Spirit)
- Church tradition (wisdom of generations past)

The Episcopal Church is liturgical. This means it has formal rights for public worship. Episcopalians use 3 central texts:

- Bible – read throughout the Church year
- Book of Common Prayer – contains calendar of Church year, services and prayers
- Hymnal – contains hymns and chants

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The structure of the Episcopal Church includes Bishops that preside over a diocese (group of parishes.) The priest presides over the parish. Beyond the priest there are parishioners and laypeople that actively participate in the democratic process of the church.

**Lutheran:**

A Lutheran is a Christian – one who trusts in Jesus Christ as Savior. The Bible is the basis of Lutheran worship.

Lutherans adhere to the 3 ancient creeds of Christianity:

- The Apostles' Creed
- The Nicene Creed
- The Athanasian Creed.

Lutheranism had its beginnings in 1517, when Martin Luther publicly called for the correction of errors in the medieval church. Luther was a pastor, professor, author, composer of hymns and reformer. His ideas still influence the Lutheran Church – he is respected, but not worshiped. Today there are more than 9,000,000 Lutherans in the United States.

**Presbyterian:**

Presbyterians are a group of Protestants whose church is founded on this concept of democratic rule under the Word of God. The Presbyterian denomination is a form of Christianity democratically organized to embrace the faith common to all Christians. Presbyterians have 2 main sources for inspiration and guidance in their faith:

- The Bible
- Creeds and confessions

John Calvin, called the father of Presbyterianism, converted to Protestantism in 1533. He interpreted the Bible as the revelation of God, emphasizing theology, worship, education, thrift, ethical behavior and representative government for his followers. From his home city, Geneva, Calvin's ideas spread throughout Europe.

**Roman Catholic:**

Since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, "Catholicism" has referred to the Catholic Church under the spiritual leadership the Holy See [the Pope] based in Rome. A Catholic is a Christian who believes that God, the creator of heaven and earth, is revealed to all people through Jesus Christ. The purpose of life is to Know Love and Serve God through divine worship and service to others.

Many holidays are the same as the Christian Holidays listed, with some additional holidays listed below.

- **All Saints Day: November 1**
- **Immaculate Conception: December 8**
- **Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary: August 15**
- **Solemnity of Mary: January 1**

**United Methodist**

Methodism traces its history from the early Christian church, through Roman Catholicism and the Protestant Reformation. Founded by John Wesley, at a prayer meeting in London in 1738, he had a powerful spiritual experience that inspired him to become the first teacher of "Methodism." After his experience in 1738, Wesley set out with his brother Charles to form societies of "Methodists," so called because the members followed a daily routine of religious observance and social work.

In colonial America, traveling lay preachers spread the gospel and Wesley's teaching to the settlers. After the American Revolution, a separate church was formed, the Methodist Episcopal Church. Other Wesleyan denominations also formed. In 1968, the Evangelical United Brethren Church and Methodist Church joined to form the United Methodist Church – the second largest Protestant denomination in the United States.

Today, John Wesley's life and teaching still carry a special meaning to United Methodists:

- The goal of being faithful disciples of Jesus Christ
- The example of sharing God through missions
- Concern with social problems
- Openness to ecumenism

**HINDUISM**

Hinduism began in India. There are many varieties of Hindu religious beliefs and practices. Some go back 5000 years. Many Hindus believe there is one God who may be worshipped in different forms. They believe God has incarnated many times to teach humans how to live. Krishna and Rama are two incarnations. Hindus have

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many images of God: Ganesha, who has the head of an elephant is one; Durga, a dancing Goddess with many arms is another.

Just as they believe God may be worshipped in many forms, Hindus believe God can be approached by different paths: Some follow a path of devotion to God, with worship and chanting; some do Yoga and meditation; some study religious ideas and texts; and some practice service to help others as their path to God. Hindus believe in reincarnation, and many are vegetarian. The River Ganges in India is their most sacred river, and Hindus bathe in it and drink the water to strengthen themselves spiritually.

The Vedanta Society, the Self-Realization Fellowship, and Siddha Yoga are some of the spiritual paths that emerged from Hinduism and that are now actively practiced in the United States. Religious observances and practices vary in different groups.

**Hindu Holidays and Festivals:**

- **Makar Sankranti**
- **Vasant Panchami**
- **Maha Shivaratri Vrat (fast)**
- **Holi (last day)**
- **Bikrami Samvat**
- **Chetra Navratas Vaisakhi (solar new year)**
- **Rama Navmi**
- **Raksha Bandham**
- **Sri Krishna Jayanti**
- **Ganesh Chaturathi**
- **Saradhas begin**
- **Asuj Navratras**
- **Dassehra**
- **Karva Chauth Vrat**
- **Diwali**

**ISLAM**

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Muhammad, an Arabian man, started having visions of an angel in 610 A.D. The angel told him about God and religion. This was written down and called the Qur'an. Muhammad taught "There is One God, Allah, and Muhammad is His prophet." The people who follow his teachings are known as Muslims. They pray five times a day, facing their sacred city, Mecca. Muslims take off their shoes and wash their hands and feet before prayer, whether at home or in their mosques. Muslims try to visit their Holy city, Mecca, once in their lifetime, and believe in giving money to the poor.

Most Muslims live in the Middle East, Far East, and Africa, but there are many Muslims in the U.S.A. Some Muslim women choose to dress modestly, wearing scarves to cover their heads, and long sleeves and skirts.

The most important holy time is Ramadan, a whole month of fasting. It is to honor Muhammad's first revelation, and when he had to flee people who were going to kill him.

**Islamic Holidays:**

- **Muharram (Islamic New Year)**
- **Mawlid al-Nabi (Muhammad's Birthday)**
- **Ramadan**
- **Eid al-Fitr (end of Ramadan)**
- **Eid al-Adha (Festival of Sacrifice)**

\*\*Note: All holidays begin at sundown on the evening before.

**JUDAISM**

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Judaism is an ancient religion that goes back more than 3000 years. Jews worship one God and follow the Ten Commandments and other moral and ethical rules found in the Torah (the first five books of the Bible). The Bible (The Torah, The Prophets, and additional writings) is Judaism's sacred book, and it is written in Hebrew, the sacred language. Moses was the greatest leader and law-giver. The place of worship for Jews is called a synagogue, or shul, or temple. The Sabbath, or Shabbat, starts Friday evening at sunset and ends Saturday evening at sunset. Friday evening is a special time in Jewish homes, when people say prayers and blessings, light candles and eat together to welcome the Sabbath. Jerusalem is the holy city and Israel is the Jewish state, but Jewish people live in many places all over the world, especially in the United States.

Jewish girls at the age of 13 have a celebration called a "Bat Mitzvah." (Bar mitzvah is for boys). Boys, men, and some women may wear a cap (yarmulke or kippah) in reverence to God. Rabbis are the spiritual leaders of the different branches of Judaism. Most common in the U.S.A. are reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Hassidic. Some groups adhere to laws of "kashrut" or strict rules about food; only food that is kosher may be eaten.

**Jewish Holidays:**

- Purim
- Passover
- Shavuot
- Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year)
- Yom Kippur (day of Atonement)
- Sukkot
- Simchat Torah
- Hanukkah

\*\*Note: All holidays begin at sundown on the evening before.

**AMERICAN INDIAN SPIRITUALITY**

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American Indian Spirituality is rooted in the recognition of the interconnectedness of all creation and the collective responsibility to protect that interconnectedness (life-giving elements of water, air and soil). American Indian's spiritually holds a belief that all life is equal-man, animal, and plant, and considers the long-term welfare of all life, not just human life. Prayer to the Creator, ceremonies, meditation and fasting, and giving thanks are important rituals. Many followers do not view their belief as an organized religion, but as an interconnected way of life. Various tribes have unique belief systems but all demonstrate the lack of separation between the natural and the supernatural and all have an intimate relationship with nature.

**CAO DAI**

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Cao Dai is considered a new religion, having been founded in 1926 in southern Vietnam by Ngo Van Chieu. The faith grew under Le Van Trug in 1925. Reported to have between 1-2 million followers, the religion is a reformed Buddhist sect, which derives its practices from Confucianism, Taoism, and Christianity.

**CONFUCIANISM**

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K'ung Fu Tzu (cofen pronounced as Confucius in English) was born in 551 BCE in China. He became a teacher wandering the countryside with a band of followers. His writings deal with living a moral and ethical life and are the basis of this religion.

**JAINISM**

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This religion originated in India, and subscribes to ahimsa (nonviolence). Its adherents refrain from killing anything and are vegetarians. Jains believe that everything one does has a good or bad effect and that one is reborn according to one's actions.

Major festivals include:

- Jayanti (the birth of their founder – Mahavira)
- Paryushana-pana (marking the end of the summer rainy season)

**SHINTOISM**

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Shintosiam, "the way of the gods" is practiced in Japan and is much older than Buddhism. Family life and being part of the community is of central importance. Festivals and celebrations are vibrant and bring good cheer. "Masturi" is a term that refers to both daily worship and special festival times.

Festivals include New Years Day where the "Kami" (the spirits) are called up through dancing and chanting, and the Cherry Blossom festival in April. In December Chichibu Night Festival is celebrated with floats (representing Kami) and fireworks.

**SIKHISM**

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In Northwest India, around 1500 A.D., Guru ("teacher") Nanak had a powerful religious experience that made him want Hindus and Muslims to set aside their differences and worship God together. He started a group which became known as Sikhs. They focus on personal devotion to God and building a strong community. They had ten great Gurus, and now have their scriptures as their Teacher: the GURU GRANTH SAHIB and other books which contain hymns of praise for God and rules for living. Sikhs believe in one God and in reincarnation. They encourage people to live truthfully, and promote the equality of men and women.

When girls and boys are 14 or 15, they join the community (Khalsa) in a special ceremony. Sikhs often wear particular clothes, some wear only white. The men may wear turbans and have beards, and carry a dagger ("kirpan") that symbolizes their willingness to fight against injustice and religious oppression. They serve a "sacred pudding" at religious celebrations and other events like weddings.

Sikh headquarters is the "Golden Temple" in India. Every year in the spring, they have the Hola Mohalla. They gather to hold contests in sports and military drills, and share music and poetry compositions. Many Sikhs immigrated to the United States after World War II.

Their most important holidays are Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh Sahib in January, Installation of Holy Scriptures as Guru Granth Sahib in October, and Birthday of Guru Nanak Dev Sahib in November. Sikhs celebrate many Hindu holidays as well, such as Diwali which is also called "Bandi Chhor Divas."

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## TAOISM

Tao is the belief in oneness or harmony. That harmony comes from order and respect for others, and that goodness and love are a result of correct behavior, are key concepts. Tao (pronounced "Dow") is the Chinese character for "path or way". Taoists act in humanitarian ways, feeding the hungry and looking after the frail and sick. Ying (female) and Yang (male) are opposite energies that come together as one in harmony. Taoists celebrate the life cycles of living beings. There are five sacred mountains for worship in China, where Taoism originated from.

Beautiful processions mark festivities and celebrations, such as the Chinese New Year in February. The Dragon Boat festival is held in June in honor of Ch'u Yuan, a Chinese official. August and September mark the Hungry Ghost festivals and celebrate the time when ghosts of the underworld come out and are given offerings of money, fruit and clothes.

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## ZOROASTRIANISM

Zoroastrians consider themselves "Parsi" and follow the teachings of Zoroaster (Zarathustra). They believe that all people are responsible for their actions both good and bad. Good people go to heaven and bad people go to the House of lie when they die. Fire is the symbol of their God and they hold many rituals in search of purity.

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## Religious Festivals of Light

*Information from holiday flyer from the Children's Museum of Houston*

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### **Diwali** Place of Origin: India

The observation of this festival by more than 1,000,000,000 Hindu people celebrates the homecoming of Prince Rama and his wife, Sita, after 14 years of exile. This is one of the most popular Indian festivals and is a time when homes are white-washed, cleaned and designs are drawn colored patterns at the entrances. Families gather and fireworks are ignited. This holiday is always celebrated during October or November, but not always on the same date.

### **Santa Lucia** Place of Origin: Sweden

This is a holiday celebrated by many of the 9,000,000 people of Sweden and those of Swedish decent. It is a tribute to the end of the dark season and is celebrated on December 13 with young girls dressed in white, wearing a crown of lighted candles. This is in honor of St. Lucia, who is known for her good deeds. This holiday includes a procession, dance, songs and special treats.

### **Ramadan** Place of Origin: Saudi Arabia

Over 1,000,000,000 followers of the Muslim faith observe Ramadan. This is a joyful month, where people fast (go without food) from dawn to dusk each day. The month is ended at sunset of the last day with a special meal called iftar, worship, and three days of celebration.

### **Hanukkah** Place of Origin: Israel

More than 12,000,000 people of the Jewish faith celebrate this eight-day holiday, which occurs near the winter solstice. This is in remembrance of the miracle over 2000 years ago when one day's supply of lamp oil lasted for eight days. The menorah is used to symbolize this event. It also is a reminder of religious, national and cultural freedom won for people who practice Judaism.

### **Las Posadas** Place of Origin: Mexico

This is the Christmas festival celebrated by nearly 99,000,000 people of Mexico and many Hispanic people who live in the United States. The nine days of the Posadas symbolize the nine days that Mary and Joseph looked for lodging. Many people host a Posadas party to welcome the wandering couple into their home. At this time, people form processions, wandering through the streets and passageways.

### **Christmas** Place of Origin: Israel

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This is a time when approximately 1,500,000,000 people celebrate the birth of Jesus to Mary and Joseph. Christians celebrate Jesus as the son of God and their savior from sin. Additionally, calendar years are referenced to the years from his birth. It is also a custom to decorate an evergreen tree in the home and to gather with family and friends for the sharing of food, music and gifts.

**Kwanzaa** Place of Origin: United States

Many of the 30,000,000 African Americans celebrate Kwanzaa. Each day of the seven-day holiday focuses on one of the following principals: unity, self-determination, collective work, and responsibility, creativity, faith, purpose, and cooperative economics. One of the candles of the kinara is lit each day, as the principle of the day is discussed.

**Lunar New Year** Place of Origin: China

This is a time when red (the lucky color) is used to decorate homes and red packets of money are given to children. Chinese people also wear red clothing to celebrate. It is a time to gather with family members and concentrate on positive things. The use of knives and scissors is avoided because of their symbolism as a means to end relationships and friendships. The old year (Nian) is scared away with loud voices, the banging of pots and pans and fireworks. There are approximately 141,000,000 people who celebrate Lunar New Year.

## **Religious Activities, Celebrations, and Traditions**

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### **Henna Tattoos**

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Henna is a plant best known for its use to color and condition the hair naturally. The henna plant, famous for Rajasthan, India, grows in warm climates. The leaves from the plant are crushed and make into a paste to safely draw a design directly on the skin. The result of this temporary tattoo, traditionally reddish brown in color, will last anywhere from a few days to several weeks. The application process is painless and in no way harms the skin.

Frequently recognized as Henna Tattoos, Mehndi, as it is known in India, is the latest craze yet its roots are centuries old and its practices, symbolism and traditions have been passed down through the ages by women. Traditionally the designs are placed on hands and feet, but now the modern generation has changed it all. They are now very popular on all visible areas of the body including the belly, forehead, neck arms, back and shoulders.

### **Zen Meditation**

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Zen is the Japanese name of a well known branch of Mahāyāna Buddhist schools, practiced originally in China as Chan, and subsequently in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Zen emphasizes the role of sitting meditation (zazen) in pursuing enlightenment. Zen can be considered a religion, a philosophy, or simply a practice depending on one's perspective. It has also been described as a way of life, work, and an art form.

Zen is a school of Buddhism and as such is based on and deeply-rooted in the Buddha's teachings. It is also very much the child of China and is marked by both Confucianism and especially Taoism. The Zen school calls itself, The Buddha Heart School and traces its lineage back to the Buddha, with the Flower Sermon being the first transmission of the Dharma. It's not uncommon for daily chanting to include the lineage of the school, reciting the names of all ancestors and teachers that have kept the line open.

All Zen schools, Rinzai or Soto, are versed in Buddhist Doctrine and Buddhist Philosophy, including, the Precepts, Four Noble Truths, Pratitya Samutpada, Three Signs of Being, Five Skandha, Three Fires, Four Right Efforts, Five Hindrances, Ten Fetters, the Bhavacakra (and its symbolic representation). At the same time Zen's emphasis on direct seeing into one's nature keeps it lively and at the edge of the tradition.

## **YOGA**

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Yoga focuses on harmony between mind and body. Yoga derives its philosophy from Indian metaphysical beliefs. The word yoga comes from Sanskrit language and means union or merger. The ultimate aim of this philosophy is to strike a balance between mind and body and attain self-enlightenment. To achieve this, yoga uses movement, breath, posture, relaxation and meditation in order to establish a healthy, lively and balanced approach to life.

Although the exact origins of Yoga are unknown, it is considered to be the oldest physical discipline in existence. Yoga, thus symbolizes balance in every area of life. In the earlier times, the rationale of the Yoga postures and breathing exercises was to bring stability and relaxation so practitioners could prepare for the rigors of

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meditation, sitting still and alert for long periods of time. In modern context also Yoga can play an important role in maintaining a balance between work and healthy mind.