UCSF Health demonstrates our commitment to equity by offering holistic and inclusive spiritual care on our medical campuses.

UCSF Spiritual Care Services provides responsive and respectful spiritual and emotional care to those who desire it. This winter, we honor the multitude of holiday observances of the season, both those named in the pages to follow, and many more.

We also recognize that many in our communities find sustenance in ways that may not be reflected in the holidays named here. So in the pages to come we also offer an open space, where we invite you to share what nourishes you and your loved ones at this time of year.

In this season of short days and long nights, may there be light and warmth in our connections with one another and what sustains us, and in celebrating the richness of our human diversity.
UCSF Land Acknowledgment Statement

Artis Credit: Darby Raymond-Overstreet Diné

We would like to acknowledge the Ramaytush Ohlone people, who are the traditional custodians of this land. We pay our respects to the Ramaytush Ohlone elders, past, present, and future, who call this place, the land that UCSF sits upon, their home. We are proud to continue their tradition of coming together and growing as a community. We thank the Ramaytush Ohlone community for their stewardship and support, and we look forward to strengthening our ties as we continue our relationship of mutual respect and understanding.

UCSF Spiritual Care Services is grateful to the Ramaytush Ohlone community and recognizes that acknowledging this community is foundational to any spiritual efforts we make here at UCSF Health.

To learn more about land acknowledgment statements, the Ramaytush Ohlone community and history, as well as ways to support and take action in solidarity with Indigenous groups, please visit https://diversity.ucsf.edu/initiatives/ucsf-land-acknowledgment.
Diwali, known as the Festival of Lights, is a major Indian festival and symbolizes the victory of good over evil, with lamps, candles, and fireworks as signs of joy and hope for humanity. It also is seen as a celebration of the inner light within one’s true nature that connects us with ultimate reality.

Originally known by the Sanskrit word Deepavali, meaning “a row of lights,” the name was popularly modified to Diwali, especially in northern India. Celebrations focus on lights and lamps, particularly traditional deepa or diya (earthen lamps filled with mustard oil or clarified butter [ghee]). Diwali is celebrated for five consecutive days at the end of the Hindu month of Ashwayuja (in October or November, according to the Gregorian calendar). On the day of Diwali, celebrants wear new clothes, share sweets and snacks, and light fireworks.

In 2022, Diwali begins on October 24.

Multiple reasons to celebrate:

Diwali commemorates the return of Lord Rama, with his wife Sita, to Ayodhya after a fourteen-year exile and war in which Rama killed the demon king Ravana (who had kidnapped Sita). It is believed that people lit oil lamps along the way to light up the moonless night and guide their new king and queen home.

It also commemorates the killing of the evil demon Narakasura by Lord Krishna’s wife Satyabhama. In another version, the demon was killed by Lord Krishna himself. Bathing with oils re-enacts Krishna’s being massaged and anointed with oils following his victory.

It is also a celebration of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Lamps are lit to guide her to people’s houses, and doors and windows are left open to allow her to enter. Because of this association with wealth, many businesses begin their fiscal years on Diwali and open new account books during the festival.
Sikhs celebrate Diwali because it marks the day when the foundation stone of the Golden Temple at Amritsar, Sikhs’ holiest shrine, was laid in 1588 C.E., and also because it commemorates the release of the sixth Sikh guru, Har Gobind Singh (1595 – 1644 C.E.), from prison in 1619 C.E.

Jains mark Diwali as the day when Lord Mahavira (also known as Vardhaman; 599 – 527 B.C.E.), the last of the Tirthankaras (“fordmakers”) and the founder of Jainism, attained Moksha (Nirvana, or eternal bliss). It also marks the beginning of the Jain year. There is a note of asceticism in all Jain rituals, and the celebration of Diwali is no exception. The Jains celebrate Diwali for three days, fasting and chanting the Uttaradhyayana Sutra, which contain the final pravachans (sermons) of Lord Mahavira.

The Five Days of Diwali

Diwali is celebrated over five days in most of North India. All the days except Diwali are named using the designation in the Indian calendar.

1) **Dhan-trayodashi or Dhan teras:** Dhan means “wealth” and Trayodashi means “13th day.” Thus this day falls on the 13th day of the second half of the lunar month, and is an auspicious day for shopping.

2) **Naraka Chaturdasi:** Chaturdasi is the fourteenth day, on which the demon Narakasura was killed by Krishna. In south India, this is the actual day of festivities. Children often light firecrackers to herald the demon’s defeat, and many families take the opportunity to eat elaborate meals and visit friends. In the evening, lamps are again lit and the goddess Lakshmi is worshipped and offered special dishes.

3) **Diwali:** The actual day of Diwali is celebrated on the third day of the festival, when the moon completely wanes and total darkness sets in the night sky.

4) **Govardhan Puja, also called Annakut,** is celebrated as the day that Lord Krishna defeated Indra, the god of thunder and rain. For Annakut a mountain of food is decorated, symbolizing the mountain that was lifted by Lord Krishna to prevent its villages and cattle from being flooded. Men present gifts to their wives on this day.

5) **Bhayiduj (also Bhayyaduj, Bhaubeej or Bhayitika):** On this day, brothers and sisters meet to express their love and affection for each other. Sisters ask the gods for their brothers’ long and successful lives and prepare delicacies for their siblings, and brothers give presents to their sisters.

Diwali is celebrated in many parts of the world, including the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Republic of Suriname, Canada, Guyana, Mauritius, India, Fiji, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Singapore, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, Australia, much of Africa, and the United States.
Bodhi Day is the Buddhist holiday commemorating the day that the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama (Shakyamuni), experienced enlightenment, also known as bodhi in Sanskrit and Pali. According to tradition, Siddhartha had recently forsaken years of extreme ascetic practices and resolved to sit under a peepal tree, also known as a Bodhi tree (Ficus Religiosa), and simply meditate until he found the root of suffering, and how to liberate oneself from it.

Traditions vary on what happened. Some say Siddhartha made a great vow to Nirvana and Earth to find the root of suffering, or die trying. In other traditions, while meditating he was harassed and tempted by the god Mara (literally, “Destroyer” in Sanskrit), demon of illusion. Other traditions simply state that he entered deeper and deeper states of meditation, confronting the nature of the self.

In the Pali Canon, there are several discourses said to be by Buddha himself, related to the story. In The Longer Discourse to Saccaka (MN 36), the Buddha describes his Enlightenment in three stages:

During the first watch of the night, the Buddha discovered all of his past lives in the cycle of rebirth, realizing that he had been born and reborn countless times before.

During the second watch, the Buddha discovered the Law of Karma, and the importance of living by the Eightfold Path.

During the third watch, the Buddha discovered the Four Noble Truths, finally reaching Nirvana.

My heart, thus knowing, thus seeing, was released from the fermentation of sensuality, released from the fermentation of becoming, released from the fermentation of ignorance. With release, there was the knowledge, ‘Released.’ I discerned that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’

As the morning star rose in the sky in the early morning, the third watch of the night, Siddhartha finally found the answers he sought and became Enlightened, and experienced Nirvana. Having done so, Siddhartha now became a Buddha or “Awakened One”.

The Enlightenment of the Buddha is yearly celebrated in many countries:
Bodhi Day

Bodhi Day is observed in many mainstream Mahayana traditions including the traditional Zen and Pureland Buddhist schools of China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.

Services and traditions vary amongst Buddhist sects, but all such services commemorate the Buddha’s achievement of Nirvana, and what this means for Buddhism today. Individuals may commemorate the event through additional meditation, study of the Dharma, chanting of Buddhist texts (sutras), or performing kind acts towards other beings. Some Buddhists celebrate with a traditional meal of tea, cake, and readings.

Rōhatsu

In Japanese Zen, it is known as 腊八, pronounced Rōhatsu or Rōhachi. In Japanese, the word literally means 8th day of the 12th month. It is typical for Zen monks and layperson followers to stay up the entire night before Rōhatsu practicing meditation, and the holiday is often preceded by an intensive sesshin. It is observed on the date of December 8 as a result of the Westernization of Japan during the Meiji Restoration (1862–1869). In Tendai and other Japanese sects, it is called either Shaka-Jōdō-e (釈迦成道会) or simply Jōdō-e (成道会).

Laba

The Chinese version of this festival is called Laba (臘八) which means the Eighth Day of the La (or the Twelfth) Month of the Chinese Lunar Calendar. It is most often observed in the first half of January, but it may happen on a date between the Winter Solstice (December 22) and the Chinese New Year (between January 22 and February 21).

Vesak Day

Bodhi Day is not as popularly celebrated as Vesak Day, on which the birth, enlightenment (Nirvāna), and passing away (Parinirvāna) of Gautama Buddha are celebrated.

Many Mahayana Buddhists outside of Asia, and who are not accustomed to lunar calendars, are adopting the December 8 date to celebrate Buddha’s enlightenment as well.
Christmas is the Christian feast commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ on **December 25**. First mentioned in Rome in the middle of the fourth century, the date was a Christian replacement for the Roman celebration of Sol Invictus (Latin, “the Unconquered Sun”) at the winter solstice. The observance of the date spread from Rome to the East, although some churches do not focus on the birthday of infant Jesus and others (e.g., the Armenian) celebrate Christ’s birth on **January 6**.

Over the centuries, many customs, not all of them universally observed, became attached to this day. The erection of the Christmas crib (crèche) began with Francis of Assisi, who made the first one in Greccio, Italy, in 1223. Use of Christmas greenery (trees, wreaths, etc.) was an adaptation of pre-Christian customs that began in Germanic countries but spread to England in the nineteenth century through the influence of Queen Victoria’s husband, who was German. Santa Claus (Saint Nicholas), Father Christmas, and Father Frost are all adaptations of European folk customs celebrated in the winter season. Christmas carols began as a wider custom of singing popular religious songs (as opposed to liturgical hymns) on seasonal feasts but over the years increasingly became identified with this season. Midnight services derive from the Western liturgical custom of celebrating three Masses (“Christmas” is from the Old English meaning “Christ’s Mass”) on the day at midnight, dawn, and midmorning. The seasonal exchange of gifts is connected to an imitation of the Magi as gift-bearers to the Christ child and to the custom of giving children gifts on the feast of Saint Nicholas, who was honored earlier in the month. In many countries it is still customary for gifts to be given on **January 6**, which is the day of the Magi, or Three Kings’ Day.

**Advent**

The Advent season begins about four weeks before Christmas on a Sunday. It commemorates the start of the Church year. The purpose of this period is to prepare Christians for the celebration of the Messiah’s coming and the incarnation of God as man. Christmas Eve is a special celebration on the night before Christmas (**December 24**) in which the major messianic prophecies of the Old Testament are read. In the sacred beauty of this holy night the message of Christianity is born anew in light, song, beauty and prayer.
Epiphany

Epiphany means “manifestation” or “appearance” and concludes the festival of Christmas. It celebrates the visit of the Three Kings to the Christ Child as well as the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the Jordan River.

Christian Scripture New King James Version, Luke 2:1-20:

The Birth of Jesus and the Visit of the Shepherds

And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

“Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth Peace, Goodwill Toward Men!”

So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

A Multitude of Celebrations

Celebrations of Christmas reflect the rich cultural diversity of the many communities throughout the world who honor this holy time. These include community re-enactments of Mary and Joseph seeking lodging at the inn, in the procession called Las Posadas, which is practiced throughout the Americas and in the Philippines. Children play an important role in Las Posadas, as in this re-enactment of the Nativity scene from México.
Spiritual Tradition

The Taoist spiritual tradition is a vast ocean. Flowing into it are the indigenous beliefs of the early Chinese, the personal vision of the sages, the theories and findings of the natural and medical sciences, and influences from Buddhism and Hinduism. Taoism is deeply rooted in the history and culture of China, going back several thousand years to the beginnings of Chinese civilization. The Tao is the reality underlying all existence and is the driving force of Nature. The “Way” teaches how to blend with the flow of nature and not to struggle against the inevitable. The mystery of life lies in the vital principles of yin and yang. Yin and yang represent the opposing powers of the universe united in perfect harmony. Understanding the harmony of the fundamental energies of the universe can lead to gaining access to personal and social wisdom and even immortality.

The Shamanic Origins of Taoism

The Taoist spiritual tradition is rooted in the shamanic beliefs of early China. The giants of Taoist thinking, Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, were natives of Ch’u where shamanism had a strong influence on the beliefs and cultural practices of the people. A collection of poetry titled the Ch’u-tz’u (Songs of the Land of Ch’u) describes the sacredness of nature, the ecstatic union of the shaman and the nature spirits, and the flight to the celestial realm. The people’s connection with nature was not one of distant respect but of passionate love. The shaman’s relationship with the spirits of nature was like that of a lover, and the dances and ceremonies were humanity’s attempts to “attract” the sacred powers. Now, three thousand years later, these themes are still a part of the spiritual tradition of Taoism.
The Classics of Taoism

The Lao-tzu (Tao-Te Ching), Chuang-tzu, and Lieh-tzu are called the Three Classics of Taoism. Although they were written over two thousand years ago, their wisdom is timeless, and their teachings are remarkably relevant to our times.

Taoist Ethics

Practitioners of Taoist spirituality use meditation as the primary method to cultivate the mind for health, longevity, and spiritual transformation. Although enlightenment and the attainment of immortality are the highest goals of Taoism, the importance of everyday living in the mortal world is not neglected in Taoist practice. After all, it is in this lifetime that we prepare ourselves for the return to the Tao. Taoist ethics are intimately tied to traditional Chinese views of right action. Walking in the “ways of goodness” ensures that we live a peaceful, prosperous, healthy, and long life.

Winter Solstice—Dong Jie (Dongzhi)

The day of the year that is the shortest and the night of the longest is the Fourth Day of the 11th lunar month, which marks Winter Solstice, Guo Dong. For farmers, it is the end of the harvest season. They put their tools away in preparation for the long winter days ahead. Farm animals are brought home to the barn from grazing in the pastures to be kept safe from the winter snow. The harvested crops of rice, millet and wheat are already stowed or sold.

Families travel from near and far to gather at their parents’ home for the evening meal which is very much a family affair. Mongolian hot pot is a popular dinner for this festive occasion. The next time the family is all together again under one roof will be to celebrate a brand new year at the coming of spring. Winter Solstice is also a time for visiting the cemeteries of departed family members, and paying respect to elders, ancestors, and teachers.

Shujiu, which literally means “counting nines,” is a Chinese custom that is a kind of countdown to spring. The days after Winter Solstice are divided into nine segments of nine days each. After 81 days, spring is said to be arriving. In northern China, Jiaozi (dumplings) is a must-eat food on the Winter Solstice!

In southern China, it is customary to eat glutinous rice balls on the Winter Solstice. Glutinous rice balls symbolize reunion in China; many southern Chinese also present them to relatives as gifts, and are offered to the ancestors as well.
Catholic Celebration of the Appearance
of Mary to Juan Diego in México

Our Lady of Guadalupe, in Spanish Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, is also called the Virgin of Guadalupe, and in Roman Catholicism is the Virgin Mary in her appearance before St. Juan Diego in a vision in 1531. The name also refers to the Marian apparition itself. Our Lady of Guadalupe holds a special place in the religious life of México and is one of the most popular religious devotions. Her image has played an important role as a national symbol of México, and she is honored throughout the Americas.

The shrine at the Basilica of Guadalupe is one of the most famous shrines in the world. Every year, 20 million people visit the Basilica where the cloth is displayed. An estimated 3 million pilgrims visit annually on December 12, her feast day.

According to tradition, Mary appeared to Juan Diego, who was an Aztec convert to Christianity, on December 9 and again on December 12, 1531. During her first apparition she requested that a shrine to her be built on the spot where she appeared, Tepeyac Hill (now in a suburb of Ciudad de México/Mexico City). The bishop demanded a sign before he would approve construction of a church, however. Mary then appeared a second time to Juan Diego and ordered him to collect roses. In a second audience with the bishop, Juan Diego opened his cloak, letting dozens of roses fall to the floor and revealing the image of Mary imprinted on the inside of the cloak—the image that is now venerated in the Basilica of Guadalupe. The Catholic church approved the apparition in 1555. Our Lady of Guadalupe was solemnly crowned Queen of the Mexican people in the name of Pope Leo XIII in 1895. She is also regarded as “the Mother of the Americas.” Juan Diego was canonized in 2002 by Pope John Paul II.
Prayer to Our Lady of Guadalupe for the Protection from Coronavirus

Holy Virgin of Guadalupe, Queen of the Angels and Mother of the Americas.

We fly to you today as your beloved children. We ask you to intercede for us with your Son, as you did at the wedding in Cana.

Pray for us, loving Mother, and gain for our nation and world, and for all our families and loved ones, the protection of your holy angels, that we may be spared the worst of this illness.

For those already afflicted, we ask you to obtain the grace of healing and deliverance. Hear the cries of those who are vulnerable and fearful, wipe away their tears and help them to trust.

In this time of trial and testing, teach all of us in the Church to love one another and to be patient and kind.

Help us to bring the peace of Jesus to our land and to our hearts.

We come to you with confidence, knowing that you truly are our compassionate mother, health of the sick and cause of our joy.

Shelter us under the mantle of your protection, keep us in the embrace of your arms, help us always to know the love of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Oración a Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe para la protección contra el coronavirus

Virgen Santísima de Guadalupe, Reina de los Ángeles y Madre de las Américas.
Acudimos a ti hoy como tus amados hijos. Te pedimos que intercedas por nosotros con tu Hijo, como lo hiciste en las bodas de Caná.

Ruega por nosotros, Madre amorosa, y obtén para nuestra nación, nuestro mundo, y para todas nuestras familias y seres queridos, la protección de tus santos ángeles, para que podamos salvarnos de lo peor de esta enfermedad.

Para aquellos que ya están afectados, te pedimos que les concedas la gracia de la sanación y la liberación.

Escucha los gritos de aquellos que son vulnerables y temerosos, seca sus lágrimas y ayúdalos a confiar.

En este tiempo de dificultad y prueba, enséñanos a todos en la Iglesia a amarnos los unos a los otros y a ser pacientes y amables.

Ayúdanos a llevar la paz de Jesús a nuestra tierra y a nuestros corazones.

Acudimos a ti con confianza, sabiendo que realmente eres nuestra madre compasiva, la salud de los enfermos y la causa de nuestra alegría.

Refúgianos bajo el manto de tu protección, mantennos en el abrazo de tus brazos, ayúdanos a conocer siempre el amor de tu Hijo, Jesús. Amén

Source: Catholic Diocese of St. Petersburg, Florida
Hanukkah (also spelled Chanukah), the Festival of Lights (also known as the Feast of Dedication) is celebrated for eight days to commemorate a victory for religious freedom and the rededication of the Temple in 165 BCE, and to celebrate the power of God and the faithfulness of Israel. Hanukkah is always on the 25th day of Kislev in the Hebrew calendar; in 2022 Hanukkah is observed from sundown on December 18 until sundown on December 26.

In ancient times, a Greek general known as Alexander the Great conquered lands around the Mediterranean Sea. Alexander and the leaders who came after him made sure that throughout the empire, people learned to speak and read Greek, wear Greek clothes, take Greek names, and worship Greek gods. In Judea — which was all that remained of the ancient kingdom of Israel — some Jews liked the idea of becoming Greek. Others felt differently. They didn’t want to act like Greeks. They wanted to live and worship in Jewish ways.

When King Antiochus of Syria became the ruler of Judea, he decided to destroy the Jewish religion. He set up altars to the Greek idols in every town and ordered all Jews to worship them. Anyone caught studying or teaching the Torah or even keeping Shabbat was to be put to death.

Matityahu and Judah the Maccabee
In the little town of Modi’in, an old priest named Matityahu refused to worship the Greek gods. Since his defiance put him in danger, Matityahu fled to the mountains with his five sons. “Let all who want to obey the Torah and keep God’s commandments follow me,” he declared. Some brave Jews joined Matityahu. This little group became an army in hiding.

When Matityahu died, his son Judah, who was called Judah the Maccabee, became the leader of the band. For three years, the Maccabees fought on, forcing the mighty army they faced farther and farther back. Finally, they staged a surprise attack on Jerusalem, drove off the opposing troops, and recaptured their capital.
Rededicating the Temple
Judah and his triumphant army marched to the Holy Temple, the Beit Hamikdash. They cleared the Temple and brought back the Torah and all the holy objects. Now they were ready to rededicate the Beit Hamikdash. The Hebrew word for dedication is Hanukkah. This was the first Hanukkah.

The Legend of the Oil
A legend tells that Judah and his followers could not find enough sanctified oil to keep the menorah burning. Only one tiny bottle of oil was left in the storerooms, enough to last about one day. It would take many days for more oil to arrive.

Then an amazing thing happened. Although there was hardly any oil in the menorah, its flames did not go out. On they burned—for two nights, three nights, four nights — eight nights in all. By the eighth night, more oil had arrived. The menorah was refilled, and it continued to burn. Like the spirit and faith of the Maccabees, its light did not once go out.

Lighting the Menorah
The Hanukkah menorah is a special candleholder, used only on this holiday: a hanukkiyah, in Hebrew. It has spaces for eight candles, which stand for the eight nights tradition says the oil burned on the first Hanukkah. And it has a separate space for a ninth candle, the shammash. Shammash means “servant” or “helper”. The shammash is used to light the other candles.

According to the tradition, the menorah in the temple illuminated the whole world. Therefore, King Solomon built the temple’s windows wide on the inside and narrow on the outside (the opposite of medieval castles, which tried to capture as much outside sunlight as possible), for the temple’s windows did not convey light into the temple but rather were a source of light to the outside world. This is the light of our menorah.

Special blessings are recited when the menorah is lit, to honor this miracle of eight days of light provided by the oil in the temple.

On Hanukkah, a dreidel, a four-sided top with a Hebrew letter on each side, is spun. Playing the dreidel game is not only fun... it also has a deeper meaning. The Hebrew letters inscribed on a dreidel are a Nun, Gimel, Hey or Chai, and Shin. The letters form an acronym for the Hebrew saying Nes Gadol Hayah Sham, which can be translated to “a great miracle happened there,” referring to the miracle in the temple.

Those observing Hanukkah also commemorate the miracle by eating foods cooked with olive oil, such as potato pancakes (latkes)! 
Kwanzaa is an African American holiday celebrated from December 26 to January 1. It is based on the agricultural celebrations of Africa called “the first-fruits” celebrations which were times of harvest, ingathering, reverence, commemoration, recommitment, and celebration. Therefore, Kwanzaa is a time for ingathering of African Americans for celebration of their heritage and their achievements, reverence for the Creator and creation, commemoration of the past, recommitment to cultural ideals and celebration of the good.

Kwanzaa was created out of the philosophy of Kawaida, which is a cultural nationalist philosophy that argues that the key challenge in Black peoples’ life is the challenge of culture, and that what Africans must do is to discover and bring forth the best of their culture, both ancient and current, and use it as a foundation to embody models of human excellence and possibilities to enrich and expand our lives.

This seven-day festival centers around seven symbols: a straw table mat (mkeka) on which the other objects are placed; fruits and vegetables (mazao), which symbolize the results of collective labor; ears of corn (muhindi), one for each child in the family; a libation cup (kikombe cha umoja) for the ancestors and communal drinking; gifts, to be distributed on the seventh day; and a candleholder (kinara) to hold seven candles (mishumaa saba), three red, one black, and three green, each signifying one of the seven principles (nguzo saba).

Created in the 1960s, Kwanzaa is celebrated by millions of people of African descent throughout the world African community. As a cultural holiday, it is practiced by Africans and African Americans from all religious traditions, classes, ages and political persuasions.

Ingathering of the People

Kwanzaa is a time of ingathering. Based on African first-fruits celebrations, it is a harvesting of the people; a bringing together of the most valuable fruit or products of the nation, its living human harvest, i.e., the people themselves. It is a time of ingathering for the family and of the entire community to renew and reinforce the bonds between them. It stresses the need to constantly seek and stand together on common ground in the midst of our differences and diversity.
Special Reverence for the Creator and Creation

Kwanzaa is a time of special reverence for the Creator and creation. It is a time of thanksgiving for the good in life and for life itself. This includes humans and all other species, water, air, land and natural resources. In addition, it is a time for recommitment to protect and preserve the earth and relate rightfully to the environment.

Commemoration of the Past

Kwanzaa is a time of commemoration of the past and a time of honoring ancestors. It is a time of honoring the moral obligation to remember and praise those on whose shoulders we stand; to raise and praise the names of those who gave their lives that others might live fuller and more meaningful ones. It is also a time for people of African descent to appreciate their role as “heirs and custodians of a great legacy” and to recommit to honoring this heritage by preserving and expanding it.

Recommitment to the Highest Ideals

Kwanzaa is a time of recommitment to the highest ideals of the community. These values are called the Nguzo Saba (in-goo’zo sah’bah) which in the Pan-African language of Swahili means the Seven Principles. These principles stand at the heart of the origin and meaning of Kwanzaa, for it is these values which are not only the building blocks for community but serve also as its social glue. The Nguzo Saba, first in Swahili and then in English are:

- Umoja (Unity)
- Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility)
- Nia (Purpose)
- Kujichagulia (Self-Determination)
- Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics)
- Kuumba (Creativity)
- Imani (Faith)

Celebration of the Good

Kwanzaa is an affirmation of the Good - the good life, community, culture, friendship, the bountifulness of the earth, and the wonder of the universe. The celebration of Kwanzaa is a ceremony of bonding, thanksgiving, commemoration, recommitment, a respectful marking, an honoring, a praising, and a rejoicing.

Greetings

The greetings during Kwanzaa are in Swahili. Swahili is a Pan-African language and is thus chosen to reflect African Americans’ commitment to the whole of Africa and African culture rather than to a specific ethnic or national group or culture. The greetings are to reinforce awareness of and commitment to the Seven Principles. Daily, the greeting is: “Habari gani?” (“What’s the news?”). The proper response is the name of the appropriate principle for the day. The sixth day is the climactic moment of the ritual, with a communal feast, music, addresses, and honoring of elders. Celebrants also greet by saying “Heri za Kwanzaa” or “Happy Kwanzaa.”
This festival’s name, when translated, means the birth celebration of the 10th Divine Light, or Divine Knowledges. It commemorates the birth of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh guru. The festival is one of the most widely celebrated event by Sikhs and takes place on **January 5th**.

The festival lasts for three days and is marked by early morning hymns, the reading of religious texts, the singing of devotional songs and decorations including posters, banners, flags and flowers.

**Sikhism** is a religion and philosophy founded in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent in the late 15th century. Its members are known as Sikhs. The Sikhs call their faith Gurmat (Punjabi: “the Way of the Guru”). According to Sikh tradition, Sikhism was established by Guru Nanak (1469–1539) and subsequently led by a succession of nine other Gurus. All 10 human Gurus, Sikhs believe, were inhabited by a single spirit. Upon the death of the 10th, Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the spirit of the eternal Guru transferred itself to the sacred scripture of Sikhism, Guru Granth Sahib (“The Granth as the Guru”), also known as the Adi Granth (“First Volume”), which thereafter was regarded as the sole Guru. In the early 21st century there were nearly 25 million Sikhs worldwide, the great majority of them living in the Indian state of Punjab.

A Sikh **gurdwara** includes both the house of worship proper and its associated langar, or communal refectory. The Adi Granth must be present at the gurdwara, and all attending must enter with heads covered and feet bare. Sikhs show their reverence by bowing their foreheads to the floor before the sacred scripture.
Worship consists largely of singing hymns from the scripture, and every service concludes with Ardas, a set prayer that is divided into three parts. The first part consists of a declaration of the virtues of all the Gurus, and the last part is a brief salutation to the divine name; neither part can be changed. The middle part of the Ardas is a list, in a generally agreed form, of the trials and the triumphs of the Khalsa, which are recited in clusters by a prayer leader. The congregation responds to each cluster with a fervent “Vahiguru,” which originally meant “Praise to the Guru” but is now accepted as the most common word for God. The conclusion of the service is followed by the distribution of karah prasad, a sacramental food that consists of equal parts of coarsely refined wheat flour, clarified butter, and raw sugar.

The khanda (above) is the symbol of the Sikh faith, which attained its current form around the first decade of the 20th century. It is an amalgam of three symbols: a double-edged khanda (ceremonial sword) in the center; a chakkar (or chakram, the circle); and two single-edged swords, or kirpan, crossed at the bottom, which sit on either side of the khanda and chakkar. These represent the dual characteristics of Miri-Piri, indicating the integration of both spiritual and temporal sovereignty together. The khanda depicts the Sikh doctrine Deg Tegh Fateh (a Sikh slogan in the Punjabi language that signifies the dual responsibility of the Khalsa (the community of Sikhs as well as specially initiated Sikhs): to provide food and protection for the needy and oppressed. In recent years, the khanda has also been used to show solidarity with and within the Sikh community after high profile shootings in the United States.

Sri Harmandir Sahib, also know as the Golden Temple in Amritsar is the holiest shrine of the Sikh religion. Also known as the Shri Darbar Shaib, it is in the center of the old part of Amritsar. The Golden Temple sits on a rectangular platform, surrounded by a pool of water called the Amrit Sarovar from which the City is named.
With the new moon comes the lunar New Year of the holy month of Ramadan, sacred to the world’s 1.8 billion Muslims (there are about 250,000 Muslims in the Bay Area). This holy month commemorates the revelation of the Koran (also spelled Qur’an), the holy book of the Muslim religion and way of life. From the time of sunrise until sunset each day of the month of Ramadan, Muslims abstain from all food and all liquid, even water. In the evening iftar is the meal at which the fast is broken each day, often with special foods. The month ends with the next new moon and a holiday called Eid-al-fitr.

The Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar, based on the cycles of the moon rather than the sun. As a result, Ramadan (the Islamic New year) moves backwards relative to the solar year and Gregorian calendar, and completes the backward cycle every 33 years. The Islamic calendar began with Muhammad’s flight from Mecca to Medina (al-Hijira) which took place 1379 years ago. In some years, Ramadan is observed during the winter; in 2023, Ramadan begins at sundown on March 22.

The Five Pillars of Islam

The “Five Pillars” of Islam, contain the mandatory acts of faith a Muslim must perform: daily prayers, annual tithe, onetime pilgrimage to Mecca, study of the Qur’an, and fasting. During the holy month of Ramadan Muslims renew a sense of connection with God through fasting, prayer, and good works; coming together each night to pray and break the fast, they draw closer to each other. Young Muslims usually begin full-time Ramadan fasting around the age of 11 or 12. There are parties for first-time fasters, with gifts and houses full of proud families. Fasting teaches self-control and is a reminder that everyone is equal before Allah in that all feel hunger and thirst. It is one way of achieving taqwa, a quality essential for the devout Muslim which connects with the feeling that Allah is within one. It’s about being mindful of one’s duties; being very
careful and responsible in life, and aware of the rights of others. It’s a way of working with one’s God-given faculties to inculcate a sense of companionship with God. Following the end of Ramadan comes the holiday of Eid al-Fitr, which begins with prayer and then becomes a full day of feasting and socializing.

**Al-Fatihah**

Al-Fatihah, “The Opening,” or Fatihatu'l-Kitab, “The Opening of the Scripture” or Ummu'l-Quran, “The Essence of the Qur’an,” (as it is variously named), has been called the Lord’s Prayer of the Muslims. It is an essential part of all Muslim worship, public and private, and no solemn contract or transaction is complete unless it is recited. The word “Allah” means “God” in Arabic. The word “Islam” means “surrender.” A Muslim is one who surrenders to Allah.

Bismillaahir-Rahmaanir-Rahiim.  ‘Al-Hamdu lillaahi Rabbil-Aalamiin;
Ar-Rahmaanir-Rahiim;  Maaliki Yawmid-Diin!
‘Iyyaaka na’-budu wa ‘iyyaaka nasta’-iin.  ‘Ihdinas-Siraatal-Musta-qiim—

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Praise be to God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds; Most Gracious, Most Merciful; Master of the Day of Judgment. Thee do we worship and Thine aid we seek. Show us the straight way, the way of those on whom thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, those who have not earned Thine anger and who go not astray.

**Reading from the Qur’an, Sura 24 — al-Nuur, “Light”**

*God is the light of the heavens and the earth.*

*The simile of God’s light is like a niche in which is a lamp,*

*The lamp in a glove of glass,*

*The glove of glass as if it were a shining star,*

*Lit from a blessed olive tree*  
*Neither of the East nor of the West,*  
*Its light nearly luminous*  
*Even if fire did not touch it.*

*Light upon light!*  
*God guides to this light*  
*Whomever God will:*  
*And God gives people examples:*  
*And God knows all things.*
Shinto arose in ancient Japan. It was not founded, per se, but emerged gradually out of the myths, beliefs, and rituals of prehistoric Japan. Local traditions were unified into a central account of creation of the Japanese islands and descent of the emperor (considered a kami) from the sun goddess (Amaterasu). Although these writings record the “age of the gods,” they are not considered scriptures.

According to Shinto belief all humans are born innocent and free of evil. “Kami” is the guiding spirit which guides people’s conscience and makes them intuitively know what is right or wrong. Actions are regarded as honorable or lacking honor. Dishonorable actions are against the ‘way’ (minchi) of kami and therefore against the flow of nature and the well-being of the community. Shinto is totally tolerant of all other religions and individual beliefs.

Kami

The most distinctive feature of the prehistoric heritage that continued within Shinto is the belief in and worship of kami. The term kami means divinities, divine presences and refers to the sacred, pure, or powerful and can be expressed in a number of different forms. There are mythological kami as well as local forces of creation and nature (such as sacred mountains, waterfalls, rivers, trees, and boulders), and even powerful human beings.

In the earliest times kami were apparently worshiped at ritual sites in natural surroundings. Later, wooden shrines (jinja) were built to house such ceremonies. Kami were not considered to permanently reside in the jinja; rather, they were temporarily invoked for ceremonies of prayer and offerings. Rituals have been closely associated with seasons and growth, such as spring planting and fall thanksgiving, the New Year, and periodic purification rites.

From the time Buddhism and Chinese culture entered Japan, Shinto was directly influenced by these traditions and was practiced in close connection with them. Shinto became intertwined with Buddhism (and Taoism); Buddhist priests served Shinto shrines, Buddhist scriptures were recited, and Buddhist rituals were performed at Shinto shrines.

Though it is said that there are 80,000 jinja, their exact number is unknown.
Many smaller shrines can only be approached with some effort. One must climb a steep series of steps along a mountainside, moving farther and farther away from a local town or village. One finally passes beneath the torii and comes upon a quiet grove of trees in which there is a small wooden structure. One usually one tugs on a rope to ring a bell, tosses a coin into a collection box, claps three times, and bows one’s head in silent prayer. The shrine itself seems more like a road marker; it is the place it indicates—the grove, the stones—whose presence one feels.

At festival times the silence gives way to the noise of the crowds and chanting of young men carrying the mikoshi (portable shrine). On these occasions the jinja serves as a traditional focus of Japanese social life. Here it is the center of ancient agricultural festivals or pageants commemorating important mythological or historical events. Others center mainly around fertility rites. Ultimately jinja and the Shinto practices that surround them are viewed by most Japanese not as a religion at all but as a fundamental part of being Japanese.

**Shogatsu (New Year’s Day)**

In Japan the New Year’s holidays have a special significance. They are by far the most important and the longest holidays in the Japanese calendar. From December 30, when the holiday actually begins for most people, huge cities like Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya take on an eerie quietness until the great rush back home and a return to the office starts on January 4 or 5.

The holiday is especially a time for family and friends. A walk down any quiet street during the holidays reveals a fascinating blend of the old and the new: kadomatus decorations, made of bamboo stalks and pine boughs, standing beside the shuttered entrances of skyscrapers; Shinto shimekazari, straw ropes strung with little angular strips of white paper, hanging across the front of parking lots and supermarkets. Traditionally, New Year’s preparations have included ritual housecleaning, the clearing up of all debts, new kimono for each child in the family, and the hanging of special decorations. These ancient customs are still carefully preserved by many Japanese families to this day.
The Wiccan Calendar

The Wiccan calendar has its origin in rural, earth-based religious traditions. Its festivals follow the logic of seasonal progression as experienced by agricultural and herding peoples whose lives are centered on planting, harvesting, and storing the winter food supply thus produced.

The Wiccan calendar includes two cycles of festivals, lunar and solar, called the “Wheel of the Year,” which celebrates the mysteries of creation and reveres the Great Goddess and God, divinity honored as being both female and male. This annual cycle includes eight “sabbats” or solar festivals and monthly lunar rituals.

Many traditions hold a belief in the five classical elements, although they are seen as symbolic as representations of the phases of matter. Wicca honors these five elements in the form of the pentagram, the five elements being air, fire, water, earth, and aether (or spirit).

The Sabbats

Winter, Spring, Summer, Autumn—birth, growth, fading, death—the Wheel turns, on and on. Ideas are born, projects are consummated, plans prove impractical and die. We fall in love; we suffer loss; we consummate relationships; we give birth; we grow old; we decay.

The Sabbats are eight points where inner and the outer cycles are connected, the interstices where the seasonal, the celestial, the communal, the creative, and the personal all meet. Wiccans enact each drama in its time in order to transform themselves, recognizing renewal and rebirth even in decay and death. We are not separate from each other, from the broader world around us; we are one with the Goddess, with the God. As the Cone of Power rises, as the season changes, Wiccans arouse the power from within, the power to heal, the power to change society, the power to renew the earth.
Yule
(Winter Solstice, ca. December 20-23)

Yule or Yuletide (“Yule time” or “Yule season”) is a festival historically observed by the Germanic peoples. Scholars have connected the original celebrations of Yule to the Wild Hunt, the god Odin, and the pagan Anglo-Saxon Mōdriht.

Later departing from its pagan roots, Yule underwent Christianized reformulation, resulting in the term Christmastide. Many present-day Christmas customs and traditions such as the Yule log, Yule goat, Yule boar, Yule singing, and others stem from pagan Yule traditions. Terms with an etymological equivalent to Yule are still used in Nordic countries and Estonia to describe Christmas and other festivals occurring during the winter holiday season.

Winter Solstice is the night of longest dark, the point of deepest night and winter before the returning of new life. It is the last moment of gestation, the time in the womb that’s about to end in birth, the nothingness that becomes the universe. Wiccans affirm this passage into awareness, from nothingness to the chaos of all hope and potential. It is the total stillness of winter, the furthest descent before winter cold gives way. Rituals for Winter Solstice reflect the awakening of death into life. At Yuletide we celebrate the birthday of the sun. It is a time of joy and hope as the sun is reborn.

Representations of Yule in various groups can vary considerably. Some celebrate in a way as close as possible to how they believe Ancient Germanic pagans observed the tradition, while others observe the holiday with rituals from different sources. In Germanic Neopagan sects, Yule is celebrated with gatherings that often involve a meal and gift giving.

In many forms of Wicca, Yule is celebrated at the winter solstice as the rebirth of the Great horned hunter god, who is viewed as the newborn solstice sun. The method of gathering for this sabbat varies by practitioner. Some have private ceremonies at home, while others do so with their covens or communities of practice.
Soyal is the winter solstice ceremony of the Pueblo, Zuni and Hopi (Hopitu Shinumu) Indians, The Peaceful Ones. It is held on or near December 21, the shortest day of the year. The ritual ceremonially brings the sun back from its long winter slumber. It also marks the beginning of another cycle of the Wheel of the Year, and is a time for purification. Paphos, prayer sticks, are made prior to the Soyal Ceremony, to bless all the community, including their homes, animals, and plants. This is the longest ceremony on the ceremonial cycle, lasting up to 16 days. The sacred underground ritual chambers, called kivas, are ritually opened to mark the beginning of the Kachina season.

The Native American name for this important ceremony is ‘Soyalangwul’ from which the term ‘Soyal’ is derived.

The ceremony begins on the shortest day of the year, and symbolizes the second phase of Creation at the Dawn of Life. Its prayers and rituals implement a plan of life for the coming year, ceremonially turning back the sun toward its summer path.

Kachinas Come Down from the Peaks to Establish Life Anew

The Hopi People, indigenous inhabitants of northern Arizona, celebrate December as when the Kachinas come down from their home in the San Francisco Peaks to bring the sun back to the world. The Katsinam or Kachinas, spirits that guard over the Hopi, dance at the winter solstice Soyal Ceremony (Soyaluna or Soyalangwul), understood to mean “Establishing Life Anew for All the World.” The Hopi/Hisatsinom are one of the many Pueblo tribes in the Southwest.

“Katsinam are Hopi spirit messengers who send prayers for rain, bountiful harvests and a prosperous, healthy life for humankind. They are our friends and visitors who bring gifts and food, as well as messages to teach appropriate behavior and the consequences of unacceptable behavior. Katsinam, of which there are over two hundred and fifty different types, represent various beings, from animals to clouds.” – Official Hopi Tribal Source

Many other Indigenous communities, Native American tribes, and First Nations hold celebrations near or after the winter solstice, honoring elders who teach and share their wisdom and stories to the younger members of the tribe, passing them down by word of mouth. Many different tribes and communities with myriad cultures and traditions honor Midwinter through varied ceremonies and sacred practices.
We recognize that many in our communities find sustenance in ways that may not be reflected in the holidays named here.

Here we offer an open space, to reflect on what nourishes you and at this time of year, and engage these questions with your loved ones.

- What gives you sustenance during challenging times?

- How do you nourish connection with the values that energize and inspire you?

- What stories from your life, your family, your ancestry, your community sustain you as the nights grow long and the days grow colder?