First Days: Seasonal Religious Diversity Celebrations

Spring Waters
The joy of water in various world religions and in our daily lives.
Presentations: March 19-22, 2010

First Day of Spring: March 20, 2010
Religion

Religion can be explained as a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.

www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions
Diversity

• The fact or quality of being diverse; difference
• A point or respect in which things differ
• Variety or multiformity
• [The American Heritage College Dictionary]
JHMI Core Values

• Excellence & Discovery
• Leadership & Integrity
  • Diversity & Inclusion
• Respect & Collegiality
Baha’i’

- 7 million worldwide
- About 1.2 million in the United States
- **Ridván Festival** This twelve-day period (April 21 - May 2) celebrates the time in 1863 when Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed His Mission as God's Messenger for this age at a garden in Baghdad, that became known as the Garden of Ridván (Paradise).
- At a particular celebration event the scent of rose-water filled the air as children and youth read from first-hand accounts of the early Bahá'í as if they had experienced that historic day in 1863.
Buddhism

• Worldwide, 360 million
• About 1.5 million in the United States
  • In Buddhism water is used in offerings. Offering water to cleanse the mouth or face signifies all the positive causes or conditions that bring positive effects.
  • Offering water mixed with either incense or sandalwood to wash an enlightened being’s feet symbolizes purification. This means that by offering water to wash an enlightened being’s feet we are cleansing ourselves of our own negative karma and obscurations but also cleaning the “feet” of our own mind.
Cao Dai

• Worldwide, about 3 million
• About 25,000 in the United States
• A cup of pure water is placed on the altar during rituals, along with tea and wine.
• Tea represents *yin* and water represents *yang*
Christianity

• 2.1 billion worldwide
• About 225 million in the United States
• Water is used in many rituals as a symbol of purification of sins and commitment to the faith. Most notable is the practice of baptism.
• Baptism is recognized in nearly all denominations; however, the age of the candidate varies from infant to adult.
• Baptism can range from a few sprinkles of water on the person’s head to full immersion in a body of water.
Hinduism

• 900 million worldwide

• About 1 million in the United States

• Water, fruit, flowers and incense are offered to god during individual Hindu worship at home.

• **Kumbh Mela:** Once every 12 years, up to 10 million people share in ritual bathing at the Kumbh Mela festival at Allahabad where the waters of the Ganges and Jumna combine. Hindus from all walks of life gather there for ritual bathing, believing that their sins will be washed away. The bathing is followed by spiritual purification and a ceremony which secures the blessings of the deity.
Islam

• 1.5 billion worldwide
• About 1.6 million in the United States
• Wudhu is the ritual washing performed by Muslims before prayer. Muslims must be clean and wear good clothes before they present themselves before God.
• Washing hands: Muslims start in the name of God, and begin by washing the right, and then the left hand three times.
Jainism

• 4.2 million worldwide

• About 75,000 in North America

• Worship services consist of the recitation of a prayer expressing salutation; the ritual bathing of the statues; and the offering of prescribed substances, including water, rice, flowers, and incense. Some Jains practice daily worship at home.

• Jains are also noted to give up water when fasting and to use water sparingly while washing dishes, doing laundry, and cooking.
Judaism

• 14 million worldwide
• About 4 million in the United States
• Weddings: the bride will often visit the ritual bath known as the Mikveh in the week before the wedding, so that she may cleanse herself spiritually and enter marriage in a state of complete purity. Mikvehs vary from country to country - some are up to the standard of health clubs.
• Men sometimes visit as well in the week before their wedding, but will use separate facilities.
• In order to properly fulfill the requirements of the mikveh, the woman must remove all jewelry and even nail polish before entering the bath and must fully immerse herself in the water while reciting a special prayer.
Paganism

• 1-4 million worldwide (the number is unclear)
• About 600,000 in the United States
• Paganism includes many pantheistic (many gods) religions such as Native American, Wicca, Asatru, and Egyptian and Greek ancient religions.
• Most of these religions are earth-centered, which includes considering water/rain as sacred and purifying.
• Water is often placed on altars during rituals.
• Water is one of the four cornerstones of the belief/prayer system along with Air, Fire, Earth
Shinto

• 4 million worldwide
• 1,500 in North America
• In the past, believers practiced "misogi," the washing of their bodies in a river near the shrine. In recent years they only wash their hands and wash out their mouths in a wash basin provided within the shrine grounds
Sikhism

• 23 million worldwide
• Approx 80,000 in the United States
• The Amrit Ceremony initiation rite, begun in 1699, includes a baptism with *amrit*, a mixture of sugar and water that has been stirred with a double-edged sword. The candidates for initiation drink some of the *amrit* from the same bowl, and have it sprinkled on their eyes and hair.
Zoroastrianism

- Worldwide, about 190 thousand
- About 10,000 in North America

- Water is important in Zoroastrianism not only because of its purifying properties but also because it is essential for life.

- Zoroastrians believe that water, when pure, is sacred. Therefore they strive to keep it unpolluted, washing your hands, spitting in any natural water source or allowing anyone else to do so is not allowed.

- Washing or bathing is also a part of spiritual cleansing, and performed before special occasions such as weddings.

- In midsummer the Zoroastrians also celebrate the day of Haurvatat, who is the being that created water. On this day, they pray and give offerings by a seashore or any natural water.
Acknowledgements

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• References
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