Winter Light
The wonder of light in various world religions and in our daily lives.
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
- Baha’i’ uses light in all its forms to represent Divinity shining throughout the world to give guidance.
Buddhism

• Worldwide, 360 million

• They have the concept of “rainbow body”, it is the penultimate state of meditation in which all matter is transformed into pure light.
Cao Dai

- Worldwide, about 3 million

- They use the following passage:
  “The eye is the Master of the heart; two sources of pure light (yin and yang) are the Master; Light is the Spirit, the Spirit itself is God, God is me.”
Christianity

• 2.1 billion worldwide
• The use of light, particularly the natural light of candles, represents the flame of God’s presence and generally speaking, light is a symbol for the mystical expression of God during many holy day rituals.
Hinduism

• 900 million worldwide

• A sacred fire is an important part of a Hindu wedding

• Diwali, The Festival of Light, is a holy day at the end of October or early November

“What the festival of lights really stands for today is a reaffirmation of hope, a renewed commitment to friendship and goodwill, and a religiously sanctioned celebration of the simple - and some not so simple - joys of life.”

*Times of India editorial*
Islam

- 1.5 billion worldwide
- All the months in the Islamic calendar begin with the sighting of the new moon. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and is full of blessings through fasting or “sawm”. Even though Muslims may start and end Ramadan on slightly different days, due to Muslims living all over the world seeing the new moon at different times, it is the act of fasting together that unites them.
Jainism

• 4.2 million worldwide

• Jains celebrate Divali, The Festival of Lights, mid-Autumn

• On Divali parents will often give sweets to their children, and lamps are lit all over India. Some very religious Jains will also fast for the two days of Divali.
Judaism

- 14 million worldwide
- Hanukkah, or Chanukah, is celebrated in December and is the Jewish Festival of Lights. An eight branch candelabrum, called a Menorah, is lit from right to left. On day one, the first candle is lit; on the second night, two candles are lit, and so on, until on the eighth night all eight candles are lit. These are lit by a Shamash or servant candle and are accompanied by three blessings proceeding the candle lighting pattern. Hymns are also sung.
Paganism

- 1-4 million worldwide (the number is unclear)
- Paganism includes many pantheistic (many gods) religions such as Native American, Wicca, Asatru, and Egyptian and Greek ancient religions.
- Pagans use light in winter to celebrate the rebirth of the coming year. They light bonfires, candles, and a Yule log is lit for 12 days in mid-December to conquer darkness, banish evil and bring good luck in the new year.
Shinto

- 4 million worldwide
- The Shinto way of life often includes using mirrors in many rituals
- Their principal god is the Goddess of the Sun, Amaterasu.
Sikhism

- 23 million worldwide
- Although there are no candles in the Gurdwara, the congregational place of worship, there is always a light on to show that the Guru’s Light is always visible and is accessible to everyone at any time. Sikhs also celebrate Diwali in mid-autumn.

Diwali is known as the 'festival of lights' because houses, shops and public places are decorated with small earthenware oil lamps called Diyas. These lamps, which are traditionally fuelled by mustard oil, are placed in rows in windows, doors and outside buildings to decorate them.
Zoroastrianism

- Worldwide, about 190 thousand
- Believe that fire represents God’s light or wisdom
- Noruz, is the feast dedicated to fire. It is now celebrated as the Iranian New Year. They light many fires and have fireworks
- They worship communally in a “fire temple”, or Agiary
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• References
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