

# Redbridge Faith Forum Celebrating Upcoming

## Faith Festivals- March/April/May 2021

We hope that this Special Faith Festival bulletin finds you safe and well. Some of our trustees have shared Festivals they are celebrating and what it means to them. Although our office is closed, we are continuing to work remotely to update you with helpful information.

We would like to take this opportunity to wish Happy Naw-Ruz to our Bahai friends; Happy Passover/Chag Sameach our Jewish friends; Blessings and Happy Easter to our Christian friends; Happy Holi and Navarati to our Hindu friends; and Happy Vaisakhi to our Sikh friends; wishing a spiritual Ramadhan to our Muslim friends and Happy full moon day to our Buddhist friends.

### **Faith Festivals**

- 20<sup>st</sup> March Naw-Ruz
- 28 March - 4 April Passover / Pesach (Jewish)
- 28/29 March Holi (Hindu)
- 2 April Good Friday (Christian)/ 4 April Easter Day (Christian)
- 13<sup>th</sup> April Nawratras -Chatria Navratras:
- 13<sup>th</sup> April Vaisakhi/Baisakhi (Sikh)
- 13/14 April to 12 May (Tues/Wed) Ramadan (Muslim)
- 27<sup>th</sup> May – Vesak Full moon Day (Buddhist)

### **Baha'i Naw-Ruz (New Year) 20th March 2021**

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Naw-Ruz is one of the 9 Baha'i Holy Days that are celebrated all over the world, annually, by members of the Baha'i Community. On all of the Holy Days work is suspended and school children usually take the day off, if permitted, to celebrate with their family and community. Naw-Ruz (which literally means New Day in farsi) also marks the Vernal Equinox, the day when the sun's light strikes the Equator directly and illuminates every continent equally, and is the official first day of Spring in the Northern Hemisphere and the first day of Autumn in the Southern Hemisphere. The Vernal Equinox falls either on the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> of March and is one of the oldest celebrations in history. It has been celebrated by many communities as a secular holiday for over 3000 years. As the Baha'i calendar is a solar based one, the Baha'i Naw-Ruz will either be on the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> of March depending on the Vernal Equinox.

The Baha'i Naw-Ruz celebration immediately follows a period of 19 days of fasting, a time dedicated to spiritual renewal, when no food or drink is consumed between sunrise and sunset for Baha'is aged 15-70 years and time is devoted to reflection, meditation and prayer. As in nature there is a physical change of season and a time for renewal so, for the Baha'is, Naw-Ruz is the beginning of a new year in both the physical and spiritual sense.

There are two ways in which Naw-Ruz is celebrated. As it is the first out of the 19 Baha'is months (each month being 19 days long) that occur in the Baha'i year, or Calendar, a community 19 Day Feast will be held. This is where Baha'is come together, as they do for all of the other 19 Day Feasts, in a meeting to say prayers and readings, to have a community consultation time and to then enjoy a social time.

The second celebration is separate from the 19 Day Feast and is when Baha'is will gather, often joining several communities together, and invite family, friends and colleagues, to enjoy an evening of music, food, hospitality and various social activities. The celebration will differ according to the country's customs and cultures. There are no rituals in the Baha'i Faith and Holy Day celebrations such as Naw-Ruz, are therefore left to the individuals and communities to celebrate accordingly. It is however safe to say it is one of the happiest and most joyous of Baha'i Holy Days!

This year (2021) has been different because of the pandemic. Like most other faiths it has been impossible to meet up and celebrate in person. Social media platforms have, however, proved invaluable in allowing us to have virtual meetings and celebrations. Our local Naw-Ruz celebration this year was therefore rather low key, but nevertheless enjoyable, with stories, music, jokes and an entertaining quiz.

Carol Khorsandyon  
**Baha'i faith**

## Festival of Holi

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Holi, the festival of colours and bonfires, is one of the most joyful festive holidays of the year. It is celebrated on full moon day in February – March. Like most Hindu festivals, the date for Holi changes every year because it is dependent on the lunar calendar. It is a celebration of the arrival of Spring, the most beautiful period of the year, with new leaves sprouting on the trees and climate becoming pleasant.

### **Why is it Holi celebrated?**

Holi is associated with many interesting and enlightening ancient legends. The legend most popularly associated with it that of King Hiranyakashyapu and his son Prahlad. It signifies the triumph of good over evil, of devotion overpowering egoistic ambition.

King Hiranyakashyapu was an ambitious ruler who wanted absolute power and forbade all his subjects from worshipping God. Instead, he forced them to worship him. The King's young son, Prahlad, was an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu, and despite his father's order, refused to reject the Almighty. The arrogant King was enraged by Prahlad's defiance and made several unsuccessful attempts to end his life. Finally, Hiranyakashyapu turned to his sister Holika for assistance. She had a divine gift which made her immune to fire. Holika lured Prahlad to sit on her lap at the centre of a heap of firewood, believing that she would be unharmed and Prahlad be consumed by the fire. When the bonfire was ignited, Prahlad was unperturbed and prayed to Lord Vishnu. Prahlad's devotion saved him, untouched by the flames, whereas Holika was burnt to ashes for misusing her powers. Narsinha, an avatar of Lord Vishnu, later defeated King Hiranyakashyapu. To mark this legend bonfires are lit on Holi across India.

### **Other legends for celebrating Holi**

It was on this day that Lord Shiva opened his third eye and reduced Kamadeva (Lord of desire) to ashes, when he attempted to disrupt his meditation.

On this day, an ogress (folklore man-eating female monster) named Dhundhi, who terrorised the children in the kingdom of Prithu (or Raghu), was made to flee by their collective shouts and pranks. Though, she had secured several boons making her almost invincible, there was a chink in her armour due to a curse of Lord Shiva: this was the noise of the children. The day itself came to be called 'Adada' or 'Holika' and teaches all that evil can be defeated through a united voice.

One more legend pertains to another Holika, also known as Pootana, who came as a charming woman to kill infant Sri Krishna by feeding him with her poisoned breast. Sri Krishna, however, sucked her blood and she lay dead in all her hideous form.

This day also marks Bhagwan Manu's birth anniversary, associated with the scripture Manu Smriti.

Most relevant message for today is Manu's message which stipulates the ten attributes of dharma for mankind:

“patience, forgiveness, austerity, not to steal, purity, control of the senses, true intellect, true knowledge, truth and non-anger”.

### **What is Holi's significance**

As in the case of all our festival, this too has a profound spiritual significance. Fire is the symbol of yajna which has a powerful purifying property. All our negative physical desires, thoughts and propensities such as arrogance, selfishness, greed, lust and hatred are offered in this purifying and effulgent flame thereby kindling spiritual enlightenment within our hearts, signifying the victory of righteousness over destructive forces.

### **How is Holi celebrated**

Unlike most Hindu festivals, there are no formal religious observances for this day like fasting or worship. An image of Holika is

made of combustible materials and on the night of it is set alight in a simple ceremony with Mantras-Hymens-of the Rgveda being sometimes chanted to ward off all evil spirits. Coconuts and corn are often roasted and eaten

The day after Holi, - is observed as a day of revelry especially by throwing on one another gulal (red powder) or coloured water or perfumed coloured powder. This playful activity of throwing coloured powder or water is designed to remove the barriers that people sometimes build around themselves. Holi renews the spirit of unity and brotherhood among families and in the community. Holi, the bonfire as well as splashing colours, is now celebrated in all parts of the world where ever there are Indians.

References:

1. Sri Swami Sivananda, "Hindu Fasts & Festivals", Divine Life Society
2. Hindu Festivals (Origin, Sentiments & Rituals)
3. [www.nhsf.org.uk](http://www.nhsf.org.uk)

Vinaya Sharma

**Hindu faith**

## Pesach

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This is the festival of Passover. This remembers the exodus of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. We eat unleavened bread (Matzo) as the Israelites didn't have time to bake bread because of their speedy departure from Egypt. The day before the festival is called the fast of the firstborn. This remembers Pharaoh's edict that all first born Jewish males should be murdered. Our people escaped and we gratefully acknowledge this each year.

The Seder service is held in homes with many a large family gathering. It is also customary to invite someone who otherwise would be alone at this time. Our various foods signify and remember our forefathers' suffering as slaves. We have bitter herbs – the sadness of slavery. We have salt water – tears that were shed. We have a paste of nuts – the mortar used in building Pharaoh's great edifices.

There are four questions asked in the special book of prayer on Seder nights. These are recited by the youngest person present. My uncles always gave us a present if we did well. All families have their own traditions passed down through the generations.

Angela Banner

RFF – Trustee (Jewish)

## What Easter means to me?

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As a Christian, Easter is the most important Feast in our calendar. Within Roman Catholicism, in common with many other Christian traditions, the Easter season starts with Lent, forty day period of prayer, almsgiving and abstinence. At the start we receive 'ashes' on our heads which are a sign for us to repent and turn to the Gospel. The culmination of Lent begins with Palm Sunday which is the start of Holy Week. On this day, the last Sunday before Easter, we recall Jesus' entrance to Jerusalem and many Christians will carry branches from Palm trees, sometimes fashioned into a cross.

Holy week consist of several special celebrations in each church. Tuesday is a Day of Reconciliation where we seek God's forgiveness for our sins. Wednesday usually sees a special Mass of Chrism in the Cathedral, where each priest reaffirms their priesthood and special oils are blessed to be taken to every parish in the Diocese. Maundy Thursday is the start of what is really one continuous service, the Triduum which spreads over three days. We celebrate the Mass of the Last Supper, remembering how Jesus gathered His friends to celebrate Passover, Good Friday, where recall the Passion and death of Jesus and then Easter where, as Christians, we believe He conquered death and rose again. On Easter Saturday after sunset, at the Vigil Mass, a fire is usually lit outside each church which is blessed and then used to light the Paschal Candle from which everyone lights their own candle so spreading the 'Light of Christ'.

Easter is the most important and central feast for Christians all over the world and whichever tradition you follow, we wish you a very Happy and Peace filled Easter

**Phil Butcher**

## NAWRATRAS -CHATRIA NAVRATRAS: What is this festival?

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Naw or Nav means nine, ratra means night so it is the festival of nine nights. As with all other Hindu festivals there are a few different aspects attached to the festival of Nawratras ie

**Seasonal:** The nawratras are celebrated twice a year, in the Spring, Chatria Navratras and in the Autumn, Sharad Navratras.

Chaitra is the first month of the Hindu calendar, festivals in April are New Year Festivals eg Basakhi 13<sup>th</sup> April. Navratra are celebrated all over India and the names are:

Happy Chieti chaand - Sindhi

Happy-Gudi Padva- Maharashtra and Kannada Andhra and Konkan

Happy Yugadi- Tamil and South India

Happy Navreh- Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Hindus

Happy navaratri- Gujarati and north India

**Historical:** Some significant events that took place on the full moon day of the Chaitra, ie April Spring Navrtras

- a) On Chaitra full moon day (Shuklpksh Prathama), thousands of years/centuries ago on this day Brahmaji created the universe.
- b) The first day of the year 5123 years ago, King Yudhisthira was crowned.
- c) Vikram Samvat 2078-Emperor Vikramaditya was crowned 2078 years ago.
- d) Rama Navami, birthday of Lord Rama is on the ninth Navratra.
- e) Lord Rama's was crowned on this date too.
- f) Arya Samaj was founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati on this day.
- g) Sikh Second Guru Angad Devji's birthday - Sikh tradition.
- h) Sindh's popular social activist Saint Jhulelal Varunawatar appeared on this day too.
- i) it is the birthday of the RSS founder Dr. Keshav Rao Baliram Hedgewar ji too.

### **CELEBRATIONS: or PUJAS PERFORMED DURING NAVRATRI:**

The nine days are devoted to Maa Durga and each day a specific Devi is worshipped, and this varies in different parts of India.

However, the underlying concept is the same all over.

Basically, all devotees perform Pujas to signify victory of good over evil.

It is believed that during the Chaitra Navratras worshiping of Maa Durga in all he nine avatars helps us evolve personally and Spiritually. Life is almost like a project and that is how the Puja is structured.

1. The first 3 days are used to consolidate our strength and eliminate any weaknesses. Puja of Devis associated with STRENGTH - Maa Durga. This is very relevant even today ie before starting a project assess your strength and weaknesses.
2. During the second 3 days we look into what resources we have and consolidate these, Puja of Maa Laxhmi- Devi of wealth and Resources.
3. The last 3 days are spend performing Puja of Maa Saeswati Devi of WISDOM. Unless the strength and resources are utilised wisely, the project is likely to fail.

Just as Lord Rama, after these 9 days exercise sent his troops in to Sri Lanka and they were able to defeat Ravan and rescue Maa Sita.

Eventually, purpose of Navratras is: To meditate on the above historical aspects, learn lessons to see how life for all can be improved and be evolved Spiritually. This concept is refreshed twice a year. Spring and Autumn.

ॐ Nav Varsh Abinandan ॐ

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and Muslims believe that it is during this month that God revealed the first verses of the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Muslims see this month as a time for reflection and self-purification, and abstain from certain pleasures in life, including food and drink, from sunrise to sunset. While fasting during Ramadan is one of the five pillars in Islam and is compulsory, there are exceptions, such as young children, those who are unwell and pregnant women.

In addition to abstinence from food and drink, there are other actions that Muslims carry out during this month. These actions include:

- Charity – Many Muslims discharge their obligatory charity (Zakat) during this month;
- Performance of supererogatory nightly prayers;
- An increase in the recitation of the Quran;
- Engaging in optional good deeds and abstaining from actions considered sins.

The length of time that Muslims fast depends on the location and season, with fasting hours varying from eight to nineteen hours. This year, Muslims in the UK will be fasting for nineteen hours.

During Ramadan, Muslims wake up to partake in Suhoor - a meal just before dawn. Once dawn breaks, Muslims are considered to be in the state of fasting until sunset. At sunset, Muslims will break their fast, typically with dates and water. This is called Iftar (the breaking of the fast) and is usually followed by a meal. Breaking the fast at sunset is an occasion for family, friends and the community to come together.

The end of Ramadan is based on the sighting of the new moon and is marked by Eid-ul-Fitr, the Festival of the Breaking of the Fast. It's one of the two major holidays in the Islamic year and is celebrated with an extra prayer, as well as visiting family and friends, feasting and gift giving.

Mohamed Omar  
RFF (chair)

## Ramadan and the Covid-19 vaccine

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With Ramadan due to start on the evening of Monday 12 April, local GPs are urging Muslims not to delay having their Covid-19 vaccine – first or second dose – during the holy month. To reassure the Muslim community, the [British Islamic Medical Association](#) has reviewed the analysis of Islamic scholars and confirmed that having the vaccine does not invalidate the fast. In addition, the vaccine does not contain pork or other animal, foetal or alcohol products – this reflects the advice of the majority of Islamic scholars that it is permissible.

We are also reminding people who take prescribed medicines to continue taking them during Ramadan, but to check with their GP if the doses need to be adjusted or the times they take them changed. People who have diabetes and want to fast should speak to their GP or diabetes nurse about the safest way to do this. There is an exemption for people with diabetes, especially if they're on insulin or have any medical complications.

Please share this guidance with people and direct them to the CCGs' websites for more information: [Barking & Dagenham](#), [Havering](#), and [Redbridge](#).

## VESAK

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VESAK is a religious and cultural festival celebrated by Buddhists all over the world. It is celebrated in the day of full moon in the month of May with utmost devotion.

This day holds great importance for Buddhists as the day is marked important events that took place in the life of Buddha on this day. First comes the birth of prince Siddhartha Gautama in the year 623

B.C, in the Lumbini park, on the Indian borders of present Nepal. A pillar erected by king Ashok of India still stands to this day to commemorate this event. The second event was the attainment of Enlightenment by the Buddha, under the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya in India. The third event was Buddha's passing away at Kusinagar in India. This year Vesak falls on 26th of May.

On Vesak, all Buddhist homes, Buddhists monasteries are illuminated with lanterns and lamps. Various Buddhist groups provide free food to people including lunch, dinner, snacks, drinks. Many devout Buddhists visit Buddhist Viharas on this day in early in the morning and observe Eight precepts and listen to Buddhist monks (Bhikku) who teach the teachings of the Buddha and practise Buddhist meditation. Many Buddhists practise generosity, morality and meditation on Vesak day and engage in various meritorious activities. May you be blessed by noble triple gems Buddha, Dhamma and sangha.

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