

HOLY DAYS WITH NO FIXED DATE

UTE BEAR DANCE Ute Bear Dance is part of the Ute Native American religious tradition. The history of this and other Native American cultures dates back thousands of years into prehistoric times. The Bear Dance performed every spring by the Ute Indians of Colorado is the oldest dance that the tribe performs, dating back even further than the fifteenth century, when it was first witnessed by Spanish explorers. It is also the only dance that the Utes themselves originated, first as a mating dance or courtship ritual and later as a celebration of the arrival of spring and an opportunity to get together and socialize.

The dance is rooted in a legend about two brothers who went out hunting and came upon a bear who was standing up on his hind legs, shuffling back and forth while clawing a tree or, in some versions, scratching his back against it. The first brother continued to hunt, while the second stayed behind to observe the bear's strange movements. In return for sparing his life, the bear taught the second brother how to perform the dance and the mysterious song that accompanied it. The bear told the hunter that he should teach the dance to his people so that they could show their respect for and, at the same time, draw strength from the spirit of the bear.

Today, the Bear Dance usually takes place in an open field or corral surrounded by a fence made of brush or woven branches. Traditional women's dress for the dance includes tall white buckskin moccasins and brightly colored shawls, although today it is not uncommon to see the dancers wearing shorts and sneakers or cowboy boots and jeans. While spectators line up against the fence, two lines of dancers, one male and one female, face each other and start shuffling toward each other and then back again to the accompaniment of a small group of singers and the sound of the morache or rasp. Then the women select partners by flicking the fringe of their shawl at them, and the dance continues with the two lines divided into couples. One of the singers plays the role of "the Cat," using a willow switch to urge slow or shy dancers to move more quickly. The dancing continues for four or five days, ending when one of the couples falls down from exhaustion or the singers grow tired. There is a huge feast afterward, which is organized by the Bear Dance Chiefs.

Some scholars believe that the Bear Dance was primarily a fertility dance and that it was performed in the spring because this is when the bears emerged from hibernation and started looking for mates. This theory is supported by the fact that the dance remains a "ladies' choice," and that the women select their partners for the dance in much the same way that female bears awake first and chase the males.

Photo: Durango Herald



Although the Bear Dance was originally held at the end of February or in early March and lasted a week or more, nowadays it is more of a late spring ritual. The Southern Utes hold their Bear Dance over Memorial Day weekend in Ignacio, Colorado, while the Ute Mountain Ute tribe holds its Bear Dance during the first week in June in Towaoc. Currently, there are a few more than 3,000 Utes, most of whom live on reservations. Visitors to the reservation are allowed to watch the Bear Dance, which was at one time closed to all but Native Americans.

SYMBOLS AND CUSTOMS

Bear: According to legend, the bear was created to teach strength, wisdom, and survival skills to the Ute people. To this day, the bear remains the symbolic source of the tribe's strength and a reminder of its former superiority in war. The bear is also believed to possess the power to heal and to communicate directly with the Spirit World.

Morache: The instrument known as a morache was originally made from the jawbone of a bear. Nowadays it is often made of two notched sticks or a notched stick and a piece of bone, which are then rubbed against each other over a wooden or tin box that serves as a resonator. The sound made by these "growl sticks" imitates both the noise made by the bear and the spring's first thunder, which is believed to awaken the bears from their winter hibernation.

Plumes: One of the purposes of the Bear Dance is to give the dancers an opportunity to rid themselves of the worries and tensions that have built up over the course of a long winter. When the dancers enter the corral, they wear plumes that symbolize these worries. Then, at the end of the dance, they hang these plumes on the branch of a cedar tree located at the corral's eastern entrance, symbolically shedding their psychological burdens.

GREEN CORN DANCE

The Green Corn Festival (also called Green Corn Dance or Ceremony) is a Native American celebration and religious ceremony. The dance is held by the Creek, Cherokee, Seminole, Yuchi, and Iroquois Indians as well as other Native American tribes. The festival typically lasts for three days for all tribes and includes numerous different activities that vary from tribe to tribe. For example, the Yuchi tribe celebration begins in late April and early May and last until about the third week of July. The opening day of the ceremony varies across tribes depending when the corn is ripe. This can be any time from May to October and is determined by the "Keepers of the Faith." Corn is not to be eaten until the Great Spirit has been given his proper thanks.

During the festival, members of the tribe give thanks for the corn, rain, sun, and a good harvest. The thanksgiving is sacred to the Indians. Folk tales are popular telling what happens when thanks is not given. Some tribes even believe that they were made from corn by the Great Spirits. *Dragonfly's Tale* by Kristina Rodanas and *People of Corn, A Mayan Story* retold by Mary-Joan Gerson tell of such stories.

The Green Corn Festival is also a religious renewal. Members of the tribe join at a religious gathering and stand with heads bent to show reverence. (Indians never kneel.) After a minute a prayer is said (see Appendix A for a copy of the prayer). In between the thanksgivings is the Great Feather Dance. Depending on the tribe women, may or may not be included in this dance.

Although it is not part of the ceremonial purpose of the Green Corn Dance, council meetings are also seen during the dance and festival. With the exceptions of murder and infractions of marriage rules, the old year's minor problems are forgiven at the council meetings. Youth who have come of age and babies are given their names. This is a distinct part of Indian life.

The ball game is included in the festival. It is played at different times and the rules vary depending on the tribe. The Yuchi tribe plays a tournament in the early spring (see Appendix B for the Yuchi Tribe's annual calendar). The Iroquois tribes throw a ball at a pole to see who can throw it the highest. The Yuchi tribes have teams (boys against girls) that try to get the ball into baskets at opposite ends of a field. The Yuchi tribe has four tournament games beginning in April and lasting for four weekends. In the Yuchi tribe the boys throw and catch the ball but may not run with the ball. The girls may run with the ball as well as catch and throw the ball in order to get it into the basket.

Another part of the religious ceremony is the busk. The word busk comes from the word boskita and means to fast. The Creek New Year is marked with this part of the ceremony. At this time, members of the tribe clean out homes, throw out ashes, and buy or make new clothes. All the “filth” and broken items from the tribe are put into one common heap and burned. It is an outward sign of the inward renewal to their religion.

The “Black Drink” is also a way the Indians cleanse themselves and is another sign of renewal. The drink causes vomiting. It purifies participants from minor sins and leaves them in a state of perfect innocence. It also give them courage to be daring during war and strength to keep friendships.

At the end of every day, the people feast. Everyone can participate and enjoy the food and good harvest. Slabs of beef, corn soup, beans, squash are eaten. The tribes celebrate a good harvest and eat many different meals made from corn: tortillas, corn meal, corn bread, corn soup, and others as well.

The Green Corn Festival varies across tribes. This makes it difficult to give you all the information you will need to teach a well thought out unit. However, as I read the overriding theme of diversity and respect was evident. Although the Natives Americans traditions varied they still had respect and gratitude for what they had been blessed with in their lives. Photo: Pinterest



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May 1 Beltane Wicca/Pagan Also known as May Eve, May Day, and Walpurgis Night, happens at the beginning of May. It celebrates the height of Spring and the flowering of life. The Goddess manifests as the May Queen and Flora. The God emerges as the May King and Jack in the Green. The danced Maypole represents Their unity, with the pole itself being the God and the ribbons that encompass it, the Goddess. Colors are the Rainbow spectrum. Beltane is a festival of flowers, fertility, sensuality, and delight.



May 2 Yom HaShoah Jewish Many people in the United States, including those with Jewish ancestry or connections, observe Yom Hashoah on the 27th day of the month of Nisan. Many Jewish communities hold commemorative ceremonies or events to remember Holocaust victims who died during World War II. Activities may include lighting memorial candles and reciting the Kaddish, which is a prayer for the departed.

May 6 - June 5 Ramadan Islam Ramadan, Arabic Ramadān, in Islam, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar and the holy month of fasting. It begins and ends with the appearance of the new moon.

Islamic tradition states that on the night of 27 Ramadan—the “Night of Power” (Laylat al-Qadr)—God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad the Qur’ān, Islam’s holy book, “as a guidance for the people.” For Muslims Ramadan is a period of introspection, communal prayer (salāt) in the mosque, and reading of the Qur’ān. God forgives the past sins of those who observe the holy month with fasting, prayer, and faithful intention.

Ramadan, however, is less a period of atonement than it is a time for Muslims to practice self-restraint, in keeping with *sawm* (Arabic: "to refrain"), one of the Pillars of Islam (the five basic tenets of the Muslim religion). Although *sawm* is most commonly understood as the obligation to fast during Ramadan, it is more broadly interpreted as the obligation to refrain between dawn and dusk from food, drink, sexual activity, and all forms of immoral behaviour, including impure or unkind thoughts. Thus, false words or bad deeds or intentions are as destructive of a fast as is eating or drinking.

After the sunset prayer, Muslims gather in their homes or mosques to break their fast with a meal called *iftār* that is often shared with friends and extended family. The *iftār* usually begins with dates, as was the custom of Muhammad, or apricots and water or sweetened milk. There are additional prayers offered at night called the *tawārīh* prayers, preferably performed in congregation at the mosque. During these prayers, the entire Qur'ān may be recited over the course of the month of Ramadan. To accommodate such acts of worship in the evening, work hours are adjusted during the day and sometimes reduced in some Muslim-majority countries. The Qur'ān indicates that eating and drinking are permissible only until the "white thread of light becomes distinguishable from the dark thread of night at dawn." Thus, Muslims in some communities ring bells in the predawn hours to remind others that it is time for the meal before dawn, called the *suhūr*.

Sawm can be invalidated by eating or drinking at the wrong time, but the lost day can be made up with an extra day of fasting. For anyone who becomes ill during the month or for whom travel is required, extra fasting days may be substituted after Ramadan ends. Volunteering, performing righteous works, or feeding the poor can be substituted for fasting if necessary. Able-bodied adults and older children fast during the daylight hours from dawn to dusk. Pregnant or nursing women, children, the old, the weak, travelers on long journeys, and the mentally ill are all exempt from the requirement of fasting.

The end of the Ramadan fast is celebrated as Eid al-Fitr, the "Feast of Fast-Breaking," which is one of the two major religious holidays of the Muslim calendar (the other, Eid al-Adha, marks the end of the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca that all Muslims are expected to perform at least once in their lives if they are financially and physically able). In some communities Eid al-Fitr is quite elaborate: children wear new clothes,

women dress in white, special pastries are baked, gifts are exchanged, the graves of relatives are visited, and people gather for family meals and to pray in mosques.



May 18 Visakha Puja (Vesak) Buddhist Vesak is the holiest day of the year in Buddhism, one of the four largest religious families in the world. Buddhism is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (c. 563-483 B . C . E .), who came to be known as Buddha, or "The Enlightened One." The basic tenets of Buddhism can be summarized in the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. The Four Noble Truths are 1) the truth and reality of suffering; 2) suffering is caused by desire; 3) the way to end suffering is to end desire; and 4) the Eightfold Path shows the way to end suffering. The Eightfold Path consists of 1) right view or right understanding; 2) right thoughts and aspirations; 3) right speech; 4) right conduct and action; 5) right way of life; 6) right effort; 7) right mindfulness; and 8) right contemplation.

Vesak celebrates the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death, or attainment of Nirvana. While these anniversaries are observed in all Buddhist countries, they are not always celebrated on the same day. Theravada Buddhists, who practice the oldest form of their religion and can be found primarily in Southeast Asia, observe all three anniversaries on the full moon of the sixth month. In Japan and other Mahayana Buddhist countries, these three events are celebrated on separate days: the Buddha's birth on April 8, his enlightenment on December 8, and his death on February 15.

Although the celebrations differ from country to country, activities generally center on Buddhist temples, where people gather to listen to sermons on the life of Buddha. In the evening, there are candlelight processions around the temples, while homes are decorated with paper lanterns and oil lamps. Because it's considered important to practice the virtues of kindness to all living things, it's traditional in some countries to free caged birds on this day, or to set up booths to dispense food to the poor.

Siddhartha Gautama, who came to be called the Buddha ("the Enlightened"), was born into an aristocratic family. At the age of twenty-nine, distressed by the misery of mankind, he renounced his life of luxury and left his wife and infant son to become a wandering ascetic. For six years he practiced the most severe austerities, eating little and meditating regularly. But then he realized that self-deprivation wasn't leading him to what he sought. One morning in 528 B . C . E . , while sitting in deep meditation under the Bodhi tree , he experienced a wider vision of his own existence and derived from that vision his blueprint for religious life. In the years that followed, he laid down rules of ethics and condemned the caste system. He taught that the aim of religion is to free oneself of worldly concerns in order to attain enlightenment, or Nirvana. The Buddha trained large numbers of disciples to continue his work. He died in about 483 B . C . E .

The tradition of bathing images of the Buddha on Vesak seems to have derived from an episode in the story of his life in which the two serpents, Nanda and Upananda, bathe him after his birth. Today, the bathing ritual takes many different forms. In China, his image is carried out of the temple and into the courtyard, where it is sprinkled with water that is exceptionally pure. Sometimes the image of Buddha is placed in a big jar of water, and believers take a spoonful of water and sprinkle it over his head as they pass through the courtyard.

In Japan, Buddha's image is bathed with ama-cha, a sweet tea prepared from hydrangea leaves that have been steamed and dried. The statue of the Buddha usually shows him with one hand raised high toward heaven and the other directed toward the earth. This posture is derived from the story of his birth, soon after which he raised his right hand and lowered his left, declaring, "I am my own Lord throughout heaven and earth." Worshipers take some of the tea home with them so their faith and good health will be perpetuated.

Bodhi Tree

The tree under which the Buddha was enlightened in 528 B . C . E . was a type of ficus or Asian fig tree that can grow as high as 100 feet. Like the banyan tree, it branches indefinitely and has thick "prop" roots that support the extended branches. There are actually two points in Gautama's life where a tree plays a significant role. The first was when he was a boy and he slipped naturally into a trance while sitting under a rose-apple tree. When Gautama abandoned the ascetic life at the age of thirty-five, he recalled that early experience and again sought refuge under a tree to compose his thoughts and await enlightenment. The tree that sheltered him throughout the night came to be known as the Bodhi Tree-bodhi meaning "enlightenment" or "awakening."



May 23 Declaration of the Bab Baha'i The holy day marks the Declaration of the Bab, who in 1844 announced that He was a new divine Messenger, sent to herald a new age for humanity and to prepare the way for Baha'u'llah, the universal Messenger of God expected by people of all religions. This is a work restricted day.

May 23 Lag B'omer Jewish The name of this Jewish observance refers to the 33rd day of the counting of the Omer. An "omer" refers to a sheaf of barley or wheat. In the book of Leviticus, it is written that God commanded people to make an offering of a sheaf of barley on each of the 50 days between Passover and Shavuot. The day number was announced after the evening service, and in time this ceremony came to be known as the "counting of the Omer".

The reason why the 33rd day of this period was singled out may have something to do with an ancient pagan festival that was celebrated at the same time. Another story claims that a plague attacked Rabbi Akiba's students in the second century CE suddenly stopped on this day. Many Jewish people also mark this date by remembering the death of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who was one of Rabbi Akiva's students. In any case, this observance represents a break in the season between Passover and Shavuot.

May 29 Ascension of Baha'u'llah This important holy day is celebrated on the 29th May, at 3am. It commemorates the anniversary of the death of the founder of the Bahá'í faith, Bahá'u'lláh, and his teachings.

Bahá'u'lláh died peacefully on the morning of 29th May 1892. He now lies buried in Bahji, in a shrine surrounded by a stunning garden, which is designed to symbolise the order of the world in the future. Pilgrims to the Bahá'í shrines in Israel visit the tomb to pray there. This solemn anniversary is a day of rest, and is often observed by reading or chanting from the scriptures.

May 30 Ascension Day Christian Ascension Day is one of the earliest Christian festivals dating back to the year 68. According to the New Testament in the Bible, Jesus Christ met several times with his disciples during the 40 days after his resurrection to instruct them on how to carry out his teachings. It is believed that on the 40th day he took them to the Mount of Olives, where they watched as he ascended to heaven.

Ascension Day marks the end of the Easter season and occurs ten days before Pentecost. Depending upon the phases of the Moon in a particular year, Ascension Day is celebrated on a Thursday. However, some churches, particularly in the United States, celebrate it on the following Sunday.

Many Eastern Orthodox churches calculate the date of Pascha (Easter) according to the Julian calendar, rather than the Gregorian calendar used by many western churches, so their Ascension Day usually occurs after the western observance.

Ascension Day celebrations include processions symbolizing Christ's entry into heaven and, in some countries, chasing a "devil" through the streets and dunking it in a pond or burning it in effigy – symbolic of the Messiah's triumph over the devil when he opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

In England, eggs laid on Ascension Day are said to never go bad and will guarantee good luck for a household if placed in the roof. In Devon, it was an ancient belief that the clouds always formed into the familiar Christian image of a lamb on Ascension Day. If the weather is sunny on Ascension Day, the summer will be long and hot. If it rains on the day, crops will do badly and livestock will suffer from disease. According to Welsh superstition, it is unlucky to do any work on Ascension Day.

In Portugal, Ascension Day is associated with wishes for peace and prosperity. Traditionally, in rural communities, people make bouquets from olive branches and sheaves of wheat with poppies and daisies. The olive and wheat are symbolic of abundant harvest; the poppy stands for peace and the daisy for money. Wheat is kept in the house throughout the coming year as a symbol of prosperity.



Sources for this newsletter:

encyclopedia2.com, teacherlink.ed.usu.edu, circlesanctuary.org, timeanddate.com, britannica.com, bahai/org, bbc.co.uk. All photographs are from the subscription services Shutterstock unless otherwise identified.

Grace Notes - a daily inspirational email
If you would like to receive Grace Notes please email the Senior Chaplain, Kathleen Ennis-Durstine, and ask to be added to the subscription list.
Below is an example of a recent Grace Note



**The greatest way to live with honor in this world
is to be what we pretend to be.**
— Socrates

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Catholic Mass is held Thursday at noon and Saturday at 4 p.m. in the Main Chapel, third floor Main, room 3201.

Jummah Prayer is held Friday at 12:15 p.m. in the Main Chapel, third floor Main, room 3201