

## **Celebration and Religion: The Two Sides of the Peace Medallion**

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With the new year has recently begun, we passed a very festive period of the year. Unlike any other celebrations, almost every country celebrates the new year at the same time. When we talk about celebration, culture and religion come to mind first as the basis of traditions. Not all of the things we celebrate today are derived from religion, however, most of them are. In this article, we will look into the relationship between the religions and the celebratory traditions we still have today. First of all, what qualifies as a religion is a belief system pursued by many, naturally, there are many religions on earth currently, we could not take all of them into our article. We selected the religions that we mention deliberately in order to be inclusive and diverse, still, we acknowledge that it was not possible to mention all of the religions on earth. Even the word “celebrate” has two different definitions according to Cambridge Dictionary: first, take part in special enjoyable activities in order to show that a particular occasion is important, and second, leading a religious ceremony. This shows us the celebration and religion are fused which is another reason why we should pay attention to both positive and negative structures and traditions surrounding them.

The religious celebration is performing a ritual or commemorating a significant event/person for the said religion. As we mentioned, earth has no shortage of belief systems, so we will briefly summarize and exemplify some of their celebrations. Islam has two major eids in a year in the Islamic calendar: Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. Eid al-Fitr is a 3-day celebration after the month of fasting, and Eid al-Adha is when Muslims “sacrifice” animals like cows or sheep in order to show obedience to God. Christianity also has two major celebrations in a year: Easter and Christmas. Easter is when Christians celebrate their belief that Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day after his crucifixion, and Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Hinduism has 8 major celebrations a year, we will summarize the three most important ones: Diwali, Krishna Janmashtami, Holi. Diwali (also called Festival of Lights) is a celebration of the victory of good over evil; Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs also celebrate this holiday, Krishna Janmashtami is a two-day festival to celebrate the birth of Lord Krishna, and Holi is the celebration of Spring also called Festival of Colors. The most important celebration of Buddhism is Wesak (or Buddha Day) when the birth of Buddha is celebrated. Judaism has more than ten major celebrations in a year, we will summarize the two most important ones: Yom Kippur and Chanukkah. Yom Kippur is the most sacred day for Jewish people where they fast for 25 hours and spend the day in the synagogue, and Chanukkah (Hanukkah) is an 8-day celebration of prayer, gift-giving, and lighting the Menorah, also called Festival of Lights. One common celebration performed by all Native American religions is Sun Dance where each tribe has a type of Sun Dance peculiar to them, Sun Dances are performed privately in most cases. Traditional African Religions have very branched out celebrations with deep-rooted past establishments, one of the most common ceremonies practiced in African Religions is the Okuyi where drumming or instrumental rhythms played by respected musicians and attendees embody a deity or ancestor, energy or state of mind by performing distinct ritual movements or dances which further enhance their elevated consciousness.

It is not hard to see the pattern of celebrating the positiveness of the past and the current among all the examples we gave. As the reason for all celebrations should be, religious celebrations focus on respect for the past, hope for the future, and most importantly appreciation of the current. Even though there are many other belief systems that do not have traditional religious concepts like one specific god or recurring ceremonies, we must respect and validate every belief and their celebrations.

On the other hand, non-religious celebrations, as can be understood from their names, do not consist of any religious sign. They could be international special days, birthdays, New Year's Eve, etc. The way people celebrate may vary because of the religious rules but the purpose of the celebration is the same. Some specific celebrations have a religious root but became international and non-religious. Some celebrations are also known as a religious celebration because of people's misunderstanding. Even though the purpose is the same, the way of celebration varies as we said. This variation has cultural and religious reasons but we will talk about the religious reasons. A quick example most commonly Muslim and other religious people do not consume any alcohol, on the other hand, most of any other religions consume nearly at almost every celebration.

Probably the most popular and worldwide celebration is a birthday celebration. There is no such date of birthday celebrations beginning. When thinking of it, the celebration looks very non-religious but it has a Pagan belief behind it. Also, in many religions (i.e. Paganism, Ancient Greek Beliefs) on the birthday of someone, he or she can communicate with the god. It has a similar meaning in the 21st century. When people blow out the candles, they wish for something, not by believing that they speak with god. Because of that Pagan root, Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate birthdays. And they also believe that if there is a day to commemorate, it is Christ's death not a birth. Besides this exception most of the people celebrate birthdays.

The other example is New Year's Eve. The root of the new year celebration dates back some 4000 years to Ancient Babylon. They were celebrating the new year in March because of the vernal equinox. The celebration time had changed since that time but the purpose is the same. But there is confusion between Christmas and New Year's Eve. This has a simple reason: the date. Christian people celebrate Christmas on 25th November and New Year's Eve comes six days later which causes a worldwide misunderstanding. Even the Muslims believe in Christ and they do not celebrate Christmas, but, they celebrate New Year's Eve. But as we said because of that many people think that they do not celebrate New Year's Eve.

About international days, they have a common feeling in their cores. For example, on February 14 Valentine's Day. People do not celebrate, passionately engage in one of the purest human feelings: love. Religious borders do not encircle or clamp the lid on feelings as they are universal. Also, most of the religion's main aspects are love and respect. In general, since any international or national celebrations contain a religious ritual we can say there is no extreme difference between celebrations apart from the consumption of specific food and beverages.

To sum up, there are plenty of celebrations in the world. In this writing, we examined them according to their religious ritual. As the main purpose of the celebrations is feeling good, there is no reason to judge people because of their attitude since that judgment may disturb people. In order to maximize collective happiness, we must respect one another, their celebrations, and their beliefs. Without tolerance and acceptance, there will be nothing left to celebrate.