Holi

In support of our staff, students, faculty and postdocs, this information is offered as a resource about the Hindu observance of Holi.

MARCH 20, 2019

HISTORY AND MEANING

Holi, the festival of colors, celebrates the victory of good over evil. It also celebrates the commencement of spring season in India after the winter season. It is celebrated with utmost joy throughout India, as the festival unites Hindus of all backgrounds. People of all ages celebrate Holi by dancing and smearing each other with vivid colors. The colors represent the range of human emotions and the diversity of life’s many experiences. Holi is generally celebrated on “Phalgun Purnima” (last full moon in March per the lunar calendar). On the night before Holi, a bonfire is lit, and people burn their old things, symbolically forgiving people who have hurt them in the past. Another significance of Holi involves the slaying of the demoness Holika. Legend has it that Holika had the boon to burn anyone who sat in her lap; she was destroyed on Holi when she tried to kill a child who had unstinted faith in God. Thus, Holi’s burning fire and colorful play represent the release of stored anger and other negative attitudes by believing in God’s power and keeping faith.

TYPICAL OBSERVANCES

• People color their faces and spray others around them with dry powder and colored water.

• Large bonfires are built, and singing, dancing and celebrations happen all day.

TIPS FOR SUPPORTING THE VANDERBILT COMMUNITY

• Encourage stories from employees about the Holi festival.

• Remember that Holi is a fun-filled festival for Hindus.

• While students are not automatically excused from class for this observance, they may work with their faculty members to make accommodations. Graduate and professional students must refer to their own school and departmental vacation policies and calendars for more specific information.

• Staff members may request paid time off for this observance. Support their preference to take leave for their religious observance.

RESOURCES FOR MANAGING WELL-BEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

People feel many types of emotions during the holidays—joy, peace, stress and depression, to name a few. Whatever you feel, know you are not alone, and Vanderbilt has resources to help you through these challenges.

Faculty, Staff and Postdocs
Work/Life Connections-EAP
(615) 936-1327
vumc.org/health-wellness/work-life

Students
Office of Student Care Coordination
(615) 343-9355
vanderbilt.edu/carecoordination

This resource is part of a toolkit created by Equity, Diversity and Inclusion to highlight religious and cultural observances that members of our community may practice. This toolkit is not meant to be exhaustive, but instead to provide a general overview of how we can support staff, faculty and students. We continually refine this information and welcome your suggestions.

For more information, please contact Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at edi@vanderbilt.edu. For more information on the university’s policy on religious holy days and observances, contact the Office of the University Chaplain & Religious Life, at religiouslife@vanderbilt.edu or Human Resources at human.resources@vanderbilt.edu.

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