

**Brief Thoughts on our Many Living Traditions**  
*Festivals of Light*

When we celebrate our Festivals of Light service, it is not just a fun multi-generational service, it is a way we remind ourselves that Unitarian Universalism has embraced and learned from the wisdom of many traditions. Our roots are in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and both the Unitarian and Universalist Theologies come from the early days of Christianity on the liberal, progressive, inclusive left fringe! They were each labeled heretical along the way, but heresy comes from a root that means choice—it was the dominant church that gave such choices a negative connotation. During the 1800s, some of our Unitarian and Universalist forebears, including the Rev. Ralph Waldo Emerson began to discover and explore Eastern religious traditions. By the time of the first Congress of Religions at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, Universalists and Unitarians were in regular conversation with leaders of other traditions. During the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Earth Based or Pagan religions began to have more influence on Unitarian Universalists so that such religions were added to the list of our Living Tradition Sources. At its core, the Festivals of Light services are a celebration of our many important sources in our Living Tradition.

By our intentional inclusion of the many traditions, we recognize our polyglot nature! If we were a dog, we would be a mutt, but a happy and smart mutt! We have absorbed and included the language and wisdom of many traditions. We have learned from the religions of the world and found the core similarities between them all. Our Seven Principles remind us to practice that core wisdom we have discovered. Our statement of Living Traditions remind us of the Sources from whence our wisdom comes.

Our regular gatherings show the ways that we continue to explore our sources to help us live more faithful and fulfilling lives.

Of course we do not have time to go into any depth about the traditions we celebrate today, and some might criticize this either for cultural misappropriation or for not airing historical concerns about the religious myths of each holiday. Personally, I feel that we can recognize the holidays as they are celebrated in order to honor the traditions that have influenced our own. Even with Christmas we are not delving into the contradictions of the stories, nor of the history of the date. We are recognizing some important days that share a focus on the returning light or the enlightenment of the season. We can analyze the details at another time.

Our intent today is to celebrate the similarities in our Living Tradition Sources, to share the returning Light of enlightenment and to remind ourselves that the streams from which we draw wisdom stretch back thousands of years into human antiquity!

May we find joy and hope and love as we celebrate during this cold season of the year!

Shalom, Salaam Blessed Be, Om, Namaste, and Amen!