



FEBRUARY 2025

Welcome to the February Newsletter.

We are introducing a new feature this month. I have asked individual faith members to write about the festivals which are of significance to them during the forthcoming month. I am grateful for contributions for February from Rabbi Elisheva on Tu Bishvat, from Dee Boyle on Nirvana Day, from Sister Patricia Harriss on the Presentation in the Temple, from Rasha Ibrahim on the special nature of the month of Sha'ban, and from Varsha Gulati on Mahashivaratri. I hope these will be of general interest, and would welcome similar contributions from any members who wish to offer them for subsequent months.

Rory Allen

Message from the chair

As we finalise this Newsletter the ceasefire in Gaza has begun and we rejoice to see hostages released and that the fighting has stopped, also Palestinian Prisoners are being released in Israel. So we must all hold the situation in our thoughts and prayers and hope that the ceasefire continues and more families can be reunited.

Tina Funnell

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Forthcoming events

Holocaust Memorial

27 January is the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the extermination camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. This year Holocaust memorial day embraces the national theme 'For a better future'. Among the things we can do to achieve this are to speak up against the denial and distortion of history, to challenge prejudice and to encourage others to learn about the Holocaust as well as more recent genocides. Holocaust memorial week takes place this year from 27 to 31 January, though please note that the 600 candles event is earlier, on the 23rd.

The following events are marking Holocaust Commemoration in York.

The 600 Candles event is being held at the Chapter House of York Minster from 6.30 on 23 January. Tickets should be prebooked via the Minster website.

The City of York Civic Event, including a reading of the Seven Commitments and speeches by Lord Alf Dubs and Dr Alessandro Bucci, is taking place at York St John's University on 27 January from 6-8pm. Booking is available via this link: https://www.fatsoma.com/e/2ik2mr2e/holocaust-memorial-day-2025?utm_campaign=prom_ss&utm_medium=social&utm_source=dynamic

The Holocaust Memorial Day lecture at York University is being given this year by Dame Stephanie Shirley. Tickets can be booked at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/my-family-in-exile-tickets-1096025665269?aff=oddtcreator>

For future reference, the Clifford's Tower commemoration is being held on 16 March, but we have no further details as yet.

February's Interfaith Group Talk

Our February talk will be held on the 4th, at West Offices, from 7.00 as usual. It is Part 1 of a two part series, the second part coming later this year, under the title 'Rites of Passage'.

We will be hearing about various Rites of Passage from three faiths. This month these faiths will be Christian, Muslim and Liberal Jewish. Rather than just talking about the general Rites of Passage that people are probably more aware of, there will be several speakers talking about some different aspects that are not often discussed. There will also be opportunity for further discussions about Rites of Passage rituals connected to these three faiths that members may have had experience of so if you know of some that you would like to share with others please do join us. Dee Boyle is chairing the session and speakers are from within the membership.

Planned forthcoming YIG talks and events

The Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month in the Council West Offices (both the building and the room are fully disabled accessible). The Meetings start at 7.00 pm with a moment's silence and finish around 8.30pm with the aim of vacating the building promptly at 9.00 pm. People gather from 6.30ish for drinks and a time to 'catch up'.

MONTHLY MEETINGS 2025	
4 th February	Rites of Passage within different Faiths: Speakers from Christian, Muslim and Liberal Jewish faith groups; Dee Boyle to chair.
4 th March	The Camino Pilgrimage: a talk by Peter Orange and his daughter who have just completed the Pilgrimage. Avtar Matharu to Chair
1 st April	Music and Spirituality: a talk by Pam Heaton. Tina Funnell to chair.
6 th May	Part 2 of Rites of Passage with different faiths: Dee Boyle to chair.
3 rd June	Planning Meeting: All members are invited, and encouraged, to share their ideas about future events for YIG and to discuss the programme for Interfaith Week. Tina Funnell to chair.
7 th July	Medicine and Faith: details to be confirmed.
5 th August	Bring and Share annual picnic: venue to be agreed.
November 4th (*Interfaith Week -Traditionally Sat 11th -Sun 19th)	Events to be confirmed
December 2nd	AGM and social evening

Remembering Daryoush Mazloum

Memories from Dee Boyle, Vice Chairperson, York Interfaith Group

I first met Daryoush when I moved back to York in 1999. During the summer I attended a Peace Festival in Rowntree's Park and got to know about the Peace Centre. I went to several events there and it was at one of these that I first met Daryoush. In October that year I went to a celebration evening for the end of One World Week and Daryoush was there again at the central methodist hall, welcoming people and obviously playing an active part in the organisation of it.

A week later I heard about another group that sounded interesting – York Racial Equality Network – so I joined their group and - once again there was Daryoush helping with the events and activities.

A few weeks later I went to one of the events being organised by York Interfaith Group and guess what - there was Daryoush once again welcoming people and obviously playing an active role within that group.

It was not until I actually joined York Interfaith Group that I was told that he was one of the Founder Members of the group back in 1989, together with a few others who were also still active within the group at that time.

He has been at the forefront of everything that is York Interfaith ever since it started all those years ago and with his enthusiastic approach to everything, he always made events seem easier to organise and a pleasure to put on.

His Bahai faith was always at the heart of what he was trying to do within our city by bringing people from different faiths together, to talk to each other, to learn about each other and to find out what we had in common rather than focussing on the differences.

He has always been a regular attender at our monthly meetings at all the different venues that we have used over the years - at the Methodist Church, the York Unitarian chapel, Priory Street, the York Medical Centre and eventually at the City of York Council Offices where we meet now each month. He contributed to many of the sessions during each year and also organised events on behalf of the York Bahai group during Interfaith Week each year. Daryoush always attempted to attend most of the events during the week and so this year his presence was really and truly missed.

Since the York Interfaith Group committee and working groups were established Daryoush was a leading member of the groups in organising events and activities throughout the year. He was always a quiet yet positive influence on the committee and was a representative of York Interfaith with many other organisations throughout York, including SACRE the organisation dealing with Religious Education within schools. He had also started to play an active role in representing the Bahai Faith when York Interfaith Group members were invited to take part in teachings days within schools in the local area. These were in addition to his own voluntary work within schools.

He had many different roles within York Interfaith Group over the years and his last one was that of Treasurer. Although somewhat reluctant to take on this role he did a vital job of keeping our accounts up to date and was even starting to move us into a new direction of internet banking! It was a bit daunting for him but it was a task that he nevertheless took on board as he always did with whatever he was faced with or was asked to do.

Thinking about facing difficulties – reminded me about the difficulties we had meeting in person during the Pandemic. When COVID meant curtailing many of our activities Daryoush became a skilled person with zoom and offered members of the Interfaith Group an opportunity to come together each week for a time

of prayer, meditations and discussions reflecting on different aspects of life. It became a real life-line for some people, including me – and he continued with this albeit every two weeks rather than weekly even when the pandemic had officially ended. It only ended just recently when he was rushed into hospital and even then, he sent an email to let us know he was unwell.

He will be sadly missed by so many people, not just those of us in York Interfaith Group, and it was a great shame that he didn't get to be with us in person for the 35th anniversary of the group being here in York. As one of the founder members it would have been a real honour to have had him there in person to offer thanks for what they started all those years ago. We are so grateful for everything he did over the years to make the group what it is today. A small part of him will continue to be with us for many years to come as we hung some of the words of 'peace' in different languages onto our Interfaith Tree in the Minster Tree Festival that he wrote last year using his special pen. He was a great advocate for peace in the world and these will be a lovely legacy for him to leave us with to use within our group in future.

May he now be at peace and may a small part of his peaceful nature always be a part of us.

Thank you for being part of our lives Daryoush.

Remembering Margaret Vernon

We mourn Margaret's death on 15 January, shortly after her 88th birthday. Her life journey was also very much a faith journey, and she was comfortable in the context of interfaith and within YIG. After childhood and formal education in small town Colorado, it was two years service with the Peace Corps in Peru that widened her understanding of the world and gave her a lifelong interest in Spanish language and culture. She was already accomplished on horseback and on skis before she married John, who led her on to more ambitious mountain trips in the American Rockies, in the Peruvian Andes and the Austrian Alps. She loved guitar music, which she also played, and she sang at different times with several local choirs. She was an ambassador for Shared Interest, volunteered as a mediator, campaigned tirelessly for peace issues, joined demonstrations whenever possible, and was sent briefly to prison after one at Fylingdales. She always championed the underdog and was particularly supportive of Palestine and Cuba, both of which she had visited. After an upbringing as a Methodist, she became more critical of formal Christian belief and found herself most at home in the Quaker community, while also practising in a Buddhist sangha and other meditation. For more than 30 years she suffered increasing pain and disability from arthritis, and latterly other issues, with which she had coped bravely. Her death came too soon for us, but not too soon for her to enter whatever lies beyond the life which we here enjoy.

Talk by Hilary Moxon on the Stained Glass of York Minster by Hilary Moxon

This popular talk on 7 January was so well attended that it was standing room only: and the promise of the topic was more than fulfilled. Hilary has promised to provide some notes and illustrations which I will include in next month's newsletter, but meanwhile I will simply note for those that couldn't attend, that Hilary brought vividly to life the artistry and the thought behind the design of the windows.

The scenes from the Book of Revelation in the brilliantly restored East Window were the most dramatic and striking, but Hilary also described the subtle thinking behind one of the Chapter House window dedicated to the life of St Paul, which showed how the artist had designed the whole layout of the window panels on symbolic principles which help us to understand the mediaeval understanding of the human spiritual journey.

At the centre are two panels based on the life and death of Jesus, which was central to St Paul's life. The diagonally opposite panels at top left and bottom right showed the particular talents that he brought to his lifetime's work, while the two panels diagonally opposite one another at the bottom left and top right showed the beginning and end of his own spiritual journey, guided by his core beliefs.

A central core of values; individual talents that we contribute to the lived experience of those values; and a lifelong journey in which we testify and struggle for those values, not without tribulation: these are ideas that have not lost their freshness and importance to us seven hundred years after that window was first created.

Faith Festival Perspectives

Tu Bishvat, by Rabbi Elisheva Salamo

Tu Bishvat is not really a major holiday, more like a marking of time and season. It is full of fun traditions, though.

On February 12th this year, Jews around the world celebrate the new year. Not the ritual new year, that is in the fall, at Rosh HaShanah, but the new year for our companions on this delightful world, the trees. In Israel, where this tradition originates, the almond trees are blossoming on this date, the lunar calendar's 15th of the month of Shvat. As the lunar cycle is shorter than the solar, a lunar month is 28 or 29 days, and so to keep the calendar in line with the solar realities, our agriculturist ancestors added leap times, much as we include February 29th. This accounts for why the Jewish holidays seem to move randomly about the year.

In any case, somewhere between mid January and mid February in the Mediterranean, the sap rises, the buds swell, and the blossoms reveal their snowy glory. Grounded in a statement made by a first century rabbi, the original idea was to help farmers with the yearly demarcation for tithing of fruit. If all trees have the same new year, then one can easily determine which harvest belongs to that year, and thus accurately send a percentage of the fruit gathered during the cycle to the Temple.

In the middle ages, with a renewed interest in the tree as metaphor, mystical leaning Jewish leaders set up the institution of the ritual for celebrating trees on this day. At a minimum, one is enjoined to eat fruit, lots

of it. Some people use this date to introduce a new seasonal fruit not tasted yet during the winter, some make sure to eat of the fruits mentioned in the Torah as specific to Israel: Dates, figs, olives, grapes and pomegranates. Some people eat a fruit that has a hard outside, one with a soft outside but a hard pit, and one which is completely edible to remind us of our own resistance and openness to the blessings that the Eternal has bestowed upon the world. Some people eat 15 kinds of fruit, or even 30!

Carob is popular on the list of fruits as it symbolises ecological preparation for the future, since carob trees take so long to grow. Modern practice often connects this holiday with caring for the planet in some way - we plant trees, clean up public areas, advocate for recycling. Choose a project of your own and join us to make the trees clap their hands in joy on their special day!

Nirvana Day, by Dee Boyle

8th or 15th February Nirvana / Parinirvana Day

On Nirvana Day, Buddhists think about their lives and how they can gain the perfect peace of Nirvana. They remember friends or relations who have recently died. They reflect on the fact that death is a part of life for everyone. The idea that nothing stays the same is important to Buddhism.

The Buddhist festival of Parinirvana Day, also known as Nirvana Day, commemorates the death of the Buddha and his attainment of Nirvana.

Most Buddhists celebrate Parinirvana Day on February 15, but some celebrate it on February 8. In Bhutan, it's celebrated on the 15th day of the fourth month of the Bhutanese calendar.

Buddhists believe that the Buddha attained Nirvana, a state of freedom from physical existence and its sufferings, when he died at the age of 80.

Celebrations include:

- **Meditation:** Buddhists meditate to reflect on their own mortality and the deaths of loved ones. They also meditate for the recently deceased.
- **Visiting temples:** Buddhists visit Buddhist temples and monasteries. In monasteries, Parinirvana Day can be a social occasion with food and gifts.
- **Reading the Nirvana Sutra:** Passages from the Nirvana Sutra are often read to describe the Buddha's last days.
- **Pilgrimages:** Some Mahayana Buddhists make a pilgrimage to Kushinagar, which many believe is the site of the Buddha's death.
- **Eating vegetarian food:** Vegetarian food is eaten.
- **Releasing animals:** In some countries, birds or animals are released from cages to symbolize liberation.
- **Donations:** Donations are made to the poor and needy, as well as to monasteries and temples.

Buddhist teachings emphasize the idea that all things are transient, and that loss and impermanence are things to be accepted.

Parinirvana Day, or Nirvana Day is a Mahayana Buddhist holiday celebrated mostly in East Asia, Vietnam and the Philippines. It is also observed and celebrated in other countries around the world where Mahayana Buddhism is practised.

2nd February: Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, by Sister Patricia Harriss

For some Christian groups this feast marks the end of the Christmas season, as it records the last Gospel story of the infancy of Jesus – a significant event, indicating the direction that his life was to take, as a sacrificial offering to God.

There were two elements in the Temple ceremony: 40 days after the birth of a son, the ritual purification of the mother, which restored her to active participation in religious practices, and the solemn offering of the first-born to God, accompanied by an animal sacrifice -a lamb for wealthier parents, two turtle doves or two young pigeons for poorer people like Mary and Joseph.

In St. Luke's story there are two other characters, both old people: Simeon and Anna. Simeon is 'an upright and devout man', who has been promised by God that he will not die until he has seen the Christ. On this day, prompted by the Holy Spirit, he enters the Temple, takes the child Jesus into his arms and gives thanks that he has been allowed to see the fulfilment of God's promise of salvation for all people. He also prophesies that Mary will suffer – 'a sword will pierce your own soul also.' Anna, a prophetess, a widow for many years spent in daily prayer in the Temple, also praises God for the child.

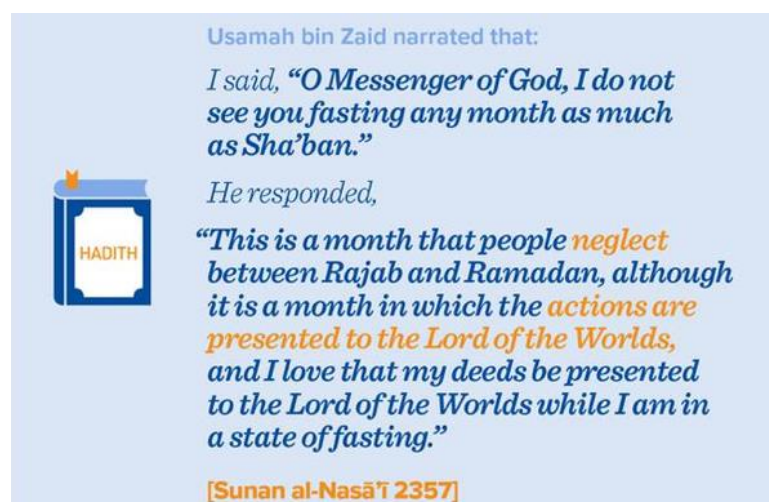
The celebration in church begins with a procession, each person carrying a lighted candle, accompanied by a chant: 'A light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel – hence the popular name 'Candlemas' for the feast.

Sha'baan: The Forgotten Month! By Rasha Ibrahim

While Muslims all-over the world are expecting the Holy Month of Ramadan in March 2025, the days before it are rife with countdowns, guides for planning ahead, and lectures about setting goals to make the best of the blessed month of Ramadan. But in all this, we often overlook the blessings of the month we are in: Sha'baan.

But what's so special about Sha'baan?

There are many narrations about the virtues of the month of Sha'baan. Here's one that summarizes two of its biggest blessings.



Usamah bin Zaid narrated that:
I said, "O Messenger of God, I do not see you fasting any month as much as Sha'ban."
He responded,
"This is a month that people neglect between Rajab and Ramadan, although it is a month in which the actions are presented to the Lord of the Worlds, and I love that my deeds be presented to the Lord of the Worlds while I am in a state of fasting."
[Sunan al-Nasā'i 2357]

(Yaqeen Institute, 2020)

To unpack that, we can see that Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) is telling us that our deeds are presented to God in the month of Sha'baan. So, Muslims try to compete hardest in excellence during that month, so their good deeds are more likely to get accepted and their sins are more likely to be forgiven.

This is specifically significant in the middle night of the month (15th of Sha'baan, which coincides with 14th Feb. 2025). The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) said: *"When the night of the middle of Sha'baan comes, God looks upon His slaves, He forgives the believers, and gives respite to the disbelievers, and leaves those who have malice with their malice (and does not forgive them) unless they relieve themselves from malice."*

Prophet Mohammed used to say that the strong person, is the one who controls their anger. He taught Muslims that the best of good deeds is helping others and providing help to those in need. For those who have nothing to offer, he advised that a smile in itself is a charity.

On Maha Shivaratri, by Varsha Gulati

Maha Shivaratri, 26th February 2025



Maha Shivaratri, 'The Great Night of Shiva') is a Hindu festival celebrated annually in honour of the deity Shiva, between February and March. According to the Hindu calendar, the festival is observed on the fourteenth day of the dark (waning) half of the lunar month of Phalguna or Magha. The festival commemorates the wedding of Shiva and Parvati, and the occasion that Shiva performs his divine dance, called the Tandava.

It is a notable festival in Hinduism, marking a remembrance of "overcoming darkness and ignorance" in life and the world. It is observed by remembering Shiva and chanting prayers, fasting, and meditating on ethics and virtues such as honesty, non-injury to others, charity, forgiveness, and the discovery of Shiva. Ardent devotees stay awake throughout this night. Others visit one of the Shiva temples or go on a pilgrimage to the Jyotirlingams. The festival is believed to have originated in 5th century BCE.

Maha Shivaratri is particularly important in the Shaivism tradition of Hinduism. Unlike most Hindu festivals which are celebrated during the day, Maha Shivaratri is celebrated at night. Furthermore, unlike most Hindu festivals which include expression of cultural revelry, the Maha Shivaratri is a solemn event notable for its introspective focus, fasting, meditation on Shiva, self study, social harmony and an all-night vigil at Shiva temples.

Poster from City of York Council on fostering

City of York Council urgently needs more foster carers to look after local children and young people who can't live with their own families. We need foster carers who can provide a safe, loving environment in which children can thrive.

It doesn't matter whether or not you're a parent, many of our foster carers have experience of looking after children of their friends or family. Some foster carers have professional childcare experience, others don't. Our carers are unique, just like the children we look after, and have a range of life experiences.

You need to have a spare bedroom for a child or young person, along with the time to give a child. You'll also need patience and be willing to learn about fostering and the needs of children who are looked after. We provide regular training opportunities, and our community is friendly, vibrant and supportive.

If you'd like to find out more about fostering in York, you can contact us by, telephone on 01904 555678,
email at

foster4york@york.gov.uk

or visit our website

[Welcome to York Fostering – York Fostering](#)

With thanks and very best wishes

Fiona

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FAITHS	January	February	March	April	May	June	
BAHA'I	21 World Religion Day		20 Now-Ruz	20-1 May Ridvan 28 9th day of Ridvan	23 Declaration of the Bab 28 The Ascension of Baha'u'llah		
BUDDHIST	1 Shuso (New Year) 16 Shinran Memorial Day 25 Honen Memorial Day 30 Sonam Losar (Nepal)	12 Magha Puja 8 or 15 Parinirvana *	20 Higan	8 Hanamatsuri	12 Vesakha Puja Buddha Day 15 Buddha's B.day		
CHINESE	7 Labajie (Laba Festival) 29 Tuan Yuan / Chun Jie (New Year: Snake)	12 Yuanxiaojie (Lantern Festival)		4 Qingmingjie Tomb Sweeping Day	31 Duanwujie/ Dragon Boat Festival		
CHRISTIAN	1 Naming of Jesus / Circumcision / Mary Mother of God 6 Epiphany [Ang/RC] 6 Theophany [3] 6/7 Christmas Eve/Day [3] 12 Baptism of Christ [Ang] 12 Baptism of the Lord [RC] 18-25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 25 Conversion of St. Paul	2 Pres. of Christ in the Temple / Candlemas 14 St. Valentine	1 St David 1 World Day of Prayer 3 Great Lenten Fast begins [3] 4 Shrove Tuesday 5 Ash Wednesday 5 Lent begins [to 17 April] 17 St Patrick 19 St Joseph [RC] 25 Annunciation [Ang/3]/RC 30 Mothering Sunday	6 Passion Sunday 13 Palm Sunday 17 Maundy Thursday 18 Good Friday 19 Holy Saturday 20 Easter Sunday 20 Pascha [3] 23 St George	11-17 Christian Aid Week 29 Ascension Day 29 Ascension Day [RC]	8 Pentecost / Whit 15 Trinity Sunday 19 Corpus Christi Body & Blood of Christ [RC] 27 Sacred Heart [RC] 29 St. Peter and Paul	
HINDU	12 Birthday of Swami Vivekananda 13 Lohri 14 Makar Sankranti / Pongal	2 Vasant Panchami/ Saraswati Puja 26 Mahashivratri	14/15 Holi	6 Rama Navami 12 Hanuman Jayanti 14 Tamil New Year		27 Ratha Yatra	
JAIN	28 Nirvana Day		14/15 Holi	10 Mahavir Jayanti			
JAPANESE	1 Ganjitsu (New Year)	3 Setsubun (Bean Scattering) 23 Emperor's birthday	3 Hinamatsuri 17-23 Higan 20 Shūbun No Hi				
JEWISH [1]	26 Dec (24) - 2 Jan Hannukah	13 Tu B'Shevat	14 Purim	13-20 Pesach 24 Yom Hashoah	1 Yom Ha'Atzma'ut 16 Lag B'Omer	2-3 Shavuot	
MUSLIM [2]	27 The Prophet's Night Journey [Isra and Mi'raj]	14 The Night of Forgiveness [Lailat-ul-Bara'ah]	1 - 30 Ramadan 27 Lailat-ul-Qadr: Night of Power 30 End of Ramadan 30 Eid-ul-Fitr*			5-9 Hajj begins 7 Eid-ul-Adha 15 Eid-ul-Ghadir 26 Al-Hijra (1447)	
RASTAFARIAN	6/7 Ethiopian Christmas Day			20 Easter Day [3]			
SIKH	6 Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh 13 Lohri		14-16 Hola Mohalla	14 Vaisakhi/ Baisakhi		16 Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev	
ZOROASTRIAN [PARSEE]	30 Jashn-e-Sadeh [IZ]		11-20 Fravardin [IZ] 21 Jamshedi Noruz [IZ] 22 Ava Mah Parab [S] 26 Khordad Sal [IZ]	20 Adar Mah Parab [S]	22 Zaratosh-t-no-Diso [S]		
PAGAN / DRUID [4]		1 Imbolc/Candlemas	20 Vernal (Spring) Equinox (Ostara / Alban Eilir)	30 May Eve 30 Beltaine Eve	1 May Day / Beltaine	21 Midsummer Solstice / Litha / Alban Hefin	
Some Other Notable Dates	1 New Year's Day / Hogmanay 21 World Religion Day 27 Holocaust Memorial Day	14 St Valentine's Day	1 St David's Day 17 St Patrick's Day 25 Lady Day	23 St George's Day	1 May Day	21 World Humanist Day 24 Midsummer Day	

(*) Indicates some uncertainty about the date.

☾ [1] Jewish Festivals commence, like Shabbat, at **sunset on the evening of the day prior** to the date shown.

☾ [2] Muslim Festivals begin in the **evening before the Gregorian dates** shown in this calendar.

[3] Indicates a festival celebrated in the Orthodox tradition of the Christian church.

☾ [4] All Baha'i and certain Druid and Pagan festivals also commence in the evening.

[5] IZ, K and S denote three Zoroastrian Calendars: Iranian Zoroastrian, Kadmi and Shahenshai.

