In support of our patients, their families and our employees, faculty members and students, this information is offered as a resource about the Wiccan Sabbat Yule (pronounced EWE-elle), also known as the winter solstice.

History and Meaning:

The winter solstice (Yule) is the longest night of the year. It marks the beginning of the dark half surrendering to the light half—each following day the sun stays out a little longer. Upon sunrise of the longest night of the year, the sun is said to be reborn. A common practice is the burning of a Yule log. This tradition dates back to when the Norsemen believed the sun was a ball of fire that rolled back to Earth around the winter solstice. Once the log was burned, the ashes were spread around the house to protect the family.

Relevant Observances:

- The ceremonial Yule log is part of the peak of the solstice festival. Tradition states that the log must be personally harvested or given as a gift (never bought). The log is placed in the fireplace and decorated with seasonal items: greenery, cider, etc. It is lit by the log from the year prior and burns through the night until ceremonially put out. Ash is the wood of choice. It is said to bring light into the hearth at the solstice.

- Devotees use bold, cold colors, symbols of the sun and evergreens to decorate the Yule altar.
- Various rituals and ceremonies celebrate the sun, cleansing/renewal and the Yule log.

Tips for Supporting Patients:

- Special foods and drinks may be requested and should be allowed if medically appropriate.
- The winter solstice is a time for reflection and therefore a time for prayer.

Tips for Supporting Staff and Faculty Members and Students:

- Employees, faculty members and students may request this time off. This should be allowed.

For More Information

Please contact the Office of Diversity and Cultural Competence at diversity@jhmi.edu or Paula Teague, senior director of the Department of Spiritual Care and Chaplaincy, at pteague1@jhmi.edu.

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M E D I C I N E