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Spring: an interfaith season of hope

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NCR Today

When I turn on NPR these days or pick up *The Washington Post*, I find myself sighing and saddened. There are wars or regular violent attacks in Syria, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, South Sudan and eastern Ukraine. Violence can break out any time in Pakistan, Lebanon or Egypt.

In the United States, there were the shooting deaths of three people at two Jewish-run facilities in Overland Park, Kan.

Religion, sadly, has entwined itself in most of these conflicts and incidents of violence. We've covered most of them on "Interfaith Voices." But most religious people of whatever tradition do not use religion as an excuse for hatred, war or violence. That's why this season is important in so many faith traditions.

In the religious world, springtime (now dawning in the Northern Hemisphere) is a season of hope, of freedom, of new life. I think of this every time I gaze at the daffodils, tulips and flowering trees. I often wonder what that must have been like for our ancient human forebears who after being pushed to the limit by the cold and forbidding weather of winter suddenly saw signs of new life, new green growth, flowering beauty.

That's why, from these very ancient times, our human ancestors sensed hope and new life in this season, and that legacy has been passed down in many religious traditions. Contemporary pagans still celebrate the ancient feast of Beltane, a spring festival featuring maypole dances and symbolizing the mystery of the sacred marriage of goddess and god. Jews commemorate eight days of Passover, remembering with prayer and symbolic food their passage from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. Christians remember the death of Jesus on the cross on Good Friday but move immediately to the feast of Easter, commemorating the resurrection of Jesus after his death on the cross.

Sikhs, too, have a springtime festival, remembering the founding of the Khalsa, or the collective body of all initiated Sikhs by Guru Gobind Singh, their very important 10th guru, in 1699. And those of the Baha'i faith mark their most important festival in springtime, when they take 12 days to commemorate the time when Baha'u'llah, their founder, revealed that he was the promised prophet. And for Theravada Buddhists, the first full moon in April is the time for a festival.

And although it was not a religious festival, Muslims tried to achieve what many called an Arab Spring in 2012, only to have their hopes dashed. But the quest for a new springtime in the Arab world refuses to die.

So at this season of the year, our religious traditions give us a basis for hope and new life. Jewish people often say, "Next year in Jerusalem." But all of us can greet the springtime with: "Maybe next year: peace on earth."

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