

Spiritually Rich, Non-Religious Holiday Celebrations

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Introduction

Holiday rituals serve a very important function. They allow us to take time out from normal, daily routines to relax, play, and celebrate life. They also serve as a time to examine and reflect upon our life-paths; to re-focus and re-direct our lives to be more in tune with our deepest goals and values. However, in order for holiday rituals to achieve these ideals, they need to be congruent with our deepest religious and political beliefs. Through the years, as my spiritual and political views diverged more and more from the norm in the United States, I grew increasingly discontent with traditional holidays.* I eventually came to see that I needed to re-examine all the holiday celebrations in my life, and make whatever changes were necessary to make them congruent with my beliefs and values. I hope that, by sharing my re-evaluation process, I can help other people who are experiencing similar dissatisfactions create holidays more in harmony with their values.

You will notice, as you read this information, that whenever I have designed new holidays, I have designed the new holidays to fall on the same days as the traditional holidays of our culture. I did this for several reasons. First, it makes things so much easier logistically. Adults already have the day off from work, and children are out of school. I also chose to design my alternative holidays this way, because I discovered that this strategy was a tried and true one. Many Christian holidays were deliberately set up on the same days as former pagan holidays with the belief that it would be easier for people to make the transition.

I really hope changes regarding holiday celebrations will go beyond the personal level.

Introduction

(Continued)

We are in need of some political changes as well--changes in our national holiday designations. This country consists of people of many different faiths and philosophies. It is, therefore, quite inappropriate to have national holidays which reflect but one faith. Though Christianity is currently the faith of many Americans, there are a significant number of people of other religions, and this is increasingly true with every decade. I hope I live to see much more of a separation of "Church" and "State" in this country. I can envision that, in the foreseeable future, we will designate all our holidays in ways that respect all faiths. For example, we could simply designate two days in December as "December Holiday" and let all citizens celebrate in ways which reflect their personal values and philosophies.

If you are interested in reading about my journey from a practicing Catholic to a person with a self-designed spirituality, please download the article [How to Get Closer to God Without Going to Church.](#)

Author's Note

I have not included alternative holidays for any of the "minority religions" of our culture. I believe it would be quite presumptuous of me to propose alternatives to religious holidays without having either a scholarly knowledge or personal experience with that faith. For example, it would take me years of study to become familiar enough with traditional Jewish holidays to feel qualified to redesign them. Furthermore, there are already a number of books on the market written by Jewish writers which address this task. I have included below a list of books

Introduction

(Continued)

which discuss alternative Jewish holidays, and other ideas for reforming Jewish rites and worship. For readers of other minority faiths, I suggest researching what kind of reform movements may be happening within your religious communities. I suspect you will find kindred souls interested in exploring alternative rituals.

SUGGESTED READINGS **REFORMING JEWISH RITES AND** **WORSHIP**

Schneider, Susan W. (1984). Jewish and Female: Choices and Charges in Our Lives Today. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Balka, C., & Rose, A., (Eds.) (1987). Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian, Gay, and Jewish. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Plaskow, Judith, (1990). Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective. San Francisco, CA: Harper-Collins.

Cottin-Pogrebin, L., (1991). Deborah, Golda, and Me: Being Female and Jewish in America. New York, NY: Anchor Books.

Ymansky, E., & Ashton, D. (1992). Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality: A Sourcebook. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Plaskow, J., & Christ, C., (Eds.) (1992). Womanspirit Rising. San Francisco, CA: Harper-Collins-San Francisco.

DECEMBER

Winter Solstice

As I became more and more disenchanted with the traditional holidays of our culture, I began to explore some of the "counter-culture" religions, like Witchcraft and Paganism. Neither of these religions were a good fit for me but I liked the fact that their rituals and holidays were very earth centered. Many of the holidays celebrated in these religions focus on the changing cycles of the earth. Being someone who is very involved in the ecology movement, I liked the idea of celebrating some of the earth's cycles.

Therefore, I now come together with friends for a pot-luck dinner on both the solstices and the equinoxes. We read poems and sing songs and engage in games and dancing. I am including below a poem I wrote, which I recited at a Winter Solstice dinner. I believe it captures the essence of the holiday.

Winter Solstice Poem

*We come together today to behold
and partake of the earth's wisdom.*

Today is the first day of winter.

*We witness the earth begin
the process of turning its energies inward
for replenishment and rejuvenation.*

*We are reminded that the blooming and
reawakening of spring and summer and the
bounty of autumn's harvest are sustained
only through the rejuvenation of winter.*

*We are inspired to refocus and redirect
our energies inward to refresh ourselves,
that our spirits may also be strengthened
and rekindled.*

Winter Solstice (Continued)

As the earth holds within it through winter the seeds that shall bloom in spring, so we hold within us today, the seeds for the dreams and goals we shall give life to in the future.

As the earth cares for and nurtures its seeds, let us also nurture the potential that lies within ourselves for continual rebirth of our greater selves.

As we appreciate the cycles of the earth, let us learn to trust in our own rhythms and cycles.

As we acknowledge and respect that the earth must sometimes be in cold and darkness, but will always return again to warmth and light,

Let us renew our faith that each of us will always come out of times of personal darkness, back into illumination.

As we again attune ourselves to the wondrous harmony of nature, our faith in a Divine purpose is ever renewed.

We are assured that pain is but a step in growth, death a catalyst for rebirth, and rebirth eternal.

As the earth has begun its winter rejuvenation process, so shall we today begin the rejuvenation of our spirits through feasting and dancing together.

You may want to consider celebrating the seasons of the earth. You might find additional ideas for such celebrations in books about Witchcraft or Native American spirituality. The Solstices and Equinoxes can also be a good time to set lifestyle goals in

Winter Solstice

(Continued)

terms of living more in harmony with the planet. Here are a few examples.

- 1) Start a compost pile.
- 2) Buy more organic food.
- 3) Make more meals from scratch instead of buying convenience foods in plastic throw-away containers.
- 4) Join, or start, a ride pool.
- 5) Find ways to reduce your consumption of unnecessary material goods.
- 6) Try some vegetarian recipes, using simple ingredients, like whole grains and beans.

Christmas

A major cause of my increasing dissatisfaction with traditional holidays was my growing away from Christianity. Since Christianity is the entire basis of Christmas, after deciding I was not a Christian, I of course had some misgivings about continuing to participate in the celebration of Christmas. Yet, for many years after I knew I was not a Christian, I did, in fact, continue to celebrate Christmas. Year after year, I somehow just got caught up in the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season. Amid the frenzy of Christmas shopping, putting up a tree, wrapping presents, having company, and baking and cooking, I simply didn't take much time to address the meaning of the holiday. However, I eventually decided that I needed to do some real soul-searching about

Winter Solstice (Continued)

my holiday celebrations. I made a commitment to take on the long overdue task of re-examining my celebration of Christmas.

I knew many other people, like myself, who didn't consider themselves Christians, who continued nonetheless to celebrate Christmas. I think that part of the reason I had clung to the idea of celebrating Christmas was that, though I wasn't a Christian, I still found some of Jesus' teachings very inspiring. I always used Christmas as a time to try to live the teachings of Jesus (that I agreed with) more fully. I tried to become more loving and forgiving, and more giving to the needy. Yet, even though I

found many of Jesus' words inspiring, I had some serious problems with a good many of his teachings. I actually had more disagreements with Jesus' teachings (and Christianity's in general) than compatibilities. I recognized that, by continuing to participate in Christian rituals, I was furthering Christianity's influence in our society, which made little sense, considering my sentiments.

With regard to Christmas in particular, it was quite clear that my beliefs were completely at odds with the religious meaning of the holiday. The religious basis for Christmas is to celebrate Jesus as the Christ, the divine messenger from God the Father. I do not share this belief. I do not believe God sends messengers in the sense portrayed in Christianity.

I realized that, by celebrating Christmas, I was reinforcing the idea of Jesus as "the Christ", the one and only Divine teacher sent from God. My view of Jesus was that he was someone who was able to tap into the "God Energy" of the universe far more than the

Christmas (Continued)

average person of his time. Thus, he was able to serve as a spiritual teacher. However, I do not see this ability to tap into God as unique to Jesus. There have been, in my opinion, others through the ages who have spoken spiritual truths which were as brilliant as Jesus' ideas. There are also many other people I view as spiritual teachers. As I contemplated how long the list of people I view as significant spiritual teachers is, the absurdity of celebrating all their birthdays became quickly obvious.

I began to see that I needed a holiday that did not have a particular person (or persons) as its focus. What would make much more sense to me was a holiday that had, as its focus, the spiritual teachings of people like Jesus. What I believed to be the basic focus of Jesus' teachings, as well as many other spiritual teachers, was how to attune oneself with God. Therefore, I decided it was time for me to replace Christmas with a holiday that had this broader idea -- of attuning oneself to God, rather than the birth of Jesus as its basis.

I pondered for some time what to call my alternative holiday. I eventually settled upon the name "Week of Attunement".

Week of Attunement

The word "attune," is of Latin origin, meaning "to move toward harmony." I defined the purpose of my alternative holiday to be:

A time to prepare oneself for the challenges of the coming year, by bringing oneself into

Alternative Holiday: Week of Attunement

*greater attunement with God**

[God is a word that means many different things to many different people. Some people might feel more comfortable using the word Goddess, the Great Spirit, the Higher Self, etc.] If you are an atheist, you can substitute the word "Universal Truths" for the word God.

I believe that a part of God resides in every individual. Therefore, I wanted to design Week of Attunement to be a time to tune into the inner self. Since it followed that all human beings have a god-self within them, I also envisioned the holiday to be a time for me to become more in tune with love for family and friends, and humanity in general. I decided to design my holiday to be a week-long one because I planned to have it encompass the New Year's holiday as well. All the ideas I was formulating about my alternative holiday fit very well with the idea of beginning the new year. In addition, I felt that, in our society, we do not take enough time off from the hustle and bustle of our lives for meditation, spiritual attunement, or just plain fun. Thus, I thought it would be a good idea to take a week off at the end of the year for these purposes.

I next began to tackle the logistics of my new holiday. I had to decide what activities and methods I was going to propose for achieving the purpose I had defined. As I brainstormed about what activities to include in my Week of Attunement holiday, I decided to examine the traditional activities of Christmas and New Year's celebrations in order to determine if I wanted to adapt any of

Week of Attunement (Continued)

these customs. I first considered whether I wanted to include gift-giving during Week of Attunement. Through the years, I had become more and more disillusioned with gift-giving at Christmas. I became so disgusted with the constant barrage of glossy newspaper advertisements, radio and television advertisements, and store displays urging me to buy, buy, buy, that I found it difficult to feel any joy in buying presents. In addition, I often found it extremely difficult to think of anything that family members or friends would want or need. In reality, most Americans have far more material possessions than they need already. As a result, it became a chore to pick out gifts. Likewise, I often received gifts that I really didn't like, and they ended up collecting dust in a closet. I also found it difficult to recover from the hundreds of dollars I usually spent on Christmas. Really, I always questioned whether I could afford to participate in Christmas! So I seriously considered discontinuing gift exchanging when I gave up Christmas, and was skeptical about including gift-giving in my new holiday. However, after having a discussion with a friend about the custom of gift-giving, I began to view it differently.

I realized that the custom of gift-giving actually had a noble and positive purpose. Gift-giving is meant to be an expression of love and caring. It is a way of saying that I appreciate you as a person, and that I'm glad you are my friend, a part of my family, etc. The problem is that the custom of gift-giving is so distorted and contaminated by our excessive cultural materialism that it becomes difficult to even remember that gift-

Week of Attunement (Continued)

giving is meant to be an act of love. I concluded that gift-giving could be a very positive part of a holiday celebration, if it was not practiced, as it typically is in our society. I concluded that the idea of gift-giving actually fit in very well with the concept of my Week of Attunement holiday. Attuning oneself with one's love for family and friends was one of the holiday's purposes, so giving gifts as an expression of that love made a lot of sense. I, therefore, decided to include the exchange of gifts as part of my new holiday celebration. However, I made an agreement with myself that I would henceforth give gifts according to the following guidelines:

- 1) When buying gifts, I will spend within a realistic budget based on my income, not on some American fantasy of the perfect Christmas gift.
- 2) I will talk openly with family and friends, and set a price range for gift buying that we both feel comfortable with.
- 3) I will give practical gifts, instead of buying useless trinkets, because I can't think of what to buy a person. For example, I have started giving gift baskets of little things like cheese, maple syrup, jellies, candies, teas, soaps, socks, pens, stationery, kitchen towels, pot-holders, etc. I find I can make these baskets for a fraction of the cost of buying pre-made ones. Last year I carried my philosophy of practical gifts a step further. I gave my sister five nice padded, wooden clothes hangers. She laughed hysterically when she opened them, but thought they were great!

Week of Attunement (Continued)

Many people appreciate practical gifts. Gift cards/ certificates are also nice gifts.

4) When I don't know what someone needs, I will call and ask their spouse or roommate for ideas, instead of guessing.

5) I will talk with family members and friends honestly about what gifts they like and don't like, so we can get better through the years at buying for one another. I will encourage returning unwanted gifts. For the last five years I have made this easy by leaving all tags on gifts, and packing the receipt in the box. Since I have already talked openly with my family about spending guidelines for gifts, I see no reason to try and hide from one another what they cost.

6) I will allow myself ample time to do my shopping. I have found that, if I procrastinate in my shopping so that I have to do it at the last minute, I start buying things just to get it done. I have also found that if, I go to malls when they are not crowded, or shop in small, "alternative" stores, I do a much better job of shopping. I will try to support local crafts-people and Third World artisans.

7) I WILL NOT MAKE EXCHANGING GIFT EXCHANGING THE PRIMARY FOCUS OF THE HOLIDAY!!!!!!

8) The last change I made regarding gift-giving is that I bought some brightly

Week of Attunement (Continued)

colored cotton calico, and sewed a bunch of gift bags of all sizes that are completely reusable. I tie them closed with bright colored ribbons. My friends and relatives are totally supportive of this ecological change. They all put the ribbons back in the bags, fold them neatly, and return the bags to me. I estimate I will be able to use the same bags for at least 20 years! I found this a good solution to the dilemma of throw-away expensive wrapping paper, which seems like such a waste of resources. I went through a period of giving gifts wrapped in brown paper bags and newspapers, and though it may have been ecological, it did take a good deal of aesthetic pleasure out of gift-giving! The many colored cotton calico gift bags are environmentally conscious and beautiful!!

The next traditional Christmas activity that I examined was decorating a Christmas tree. I was well aware that many people continued to have Christmas trees, though they no longer considered themselves Christians. Several people have, in fact, informed me that decorating pine trees was actually a pagan custom which was later Christianized. However, in this culture, a decorated pine tree is a "Christmas tree." I personally felt it would be impossible to have a decorated pine tree in my living room and not feel that I was still celebrating Christmas. If I was going to develop a new holiday, I felt I needed to eliminate the customs associated with the old holiday.

I knew I would miss having a Christmas tree. I had many wonderful family memories of picking out a tree and joyfully hanging all the ornaments that had been passed down

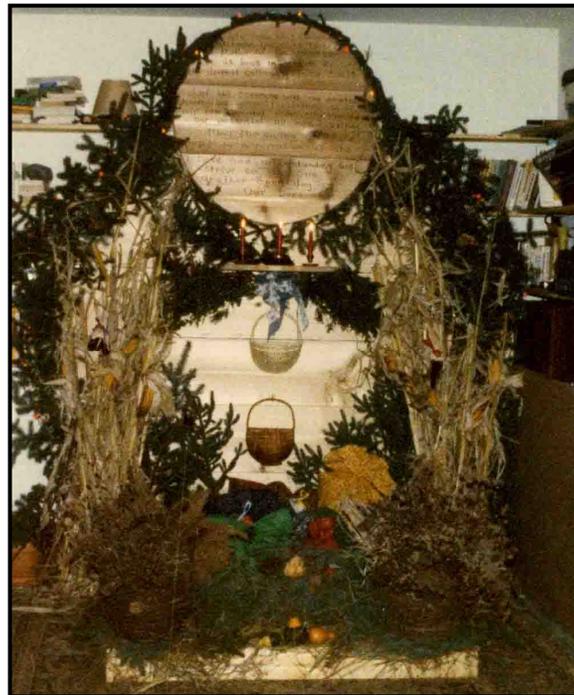
Week of Attunement (Continued)

from my grandparents, or that my parents had collected through the years. My partner was a little skeptical when I suggested to him that I no longer wanted to have a Christmas tree.

Although my partner very much supports my writing this book, and does not consider himself a Christian, he lamented that our children would not have the joyful experience of decorating a tree, because he himself had so many beautiful childhood memories about it. I assured him that we could design some way of celebrating Week of Attunement that would be as thrilling as going out into the woods as a family and chopping down a pine tree and decorating it. Despite his initial misgivings, my partner was incredibly supportive about my "purging of Christmas," as he called it. He agreed to let me propose an alternative to a tree.

What evolved out of my brainstorming was the idea of an "attunement wheel," a seven-foot wooden wheel that sits in one's living room. In front of the wheel we made a giant basket woven out of pine branches, into which we put gifts. We decorated the wheel with dried flowers, corn husks, and pine branches. We debated awhile about whether or not to hang ornaments and lights on our wheel or not. We decided to give away all our ornaments that represented Christmas, retain the "generic" ones, and hang these on the wheel.

An Attunement Wheel



Week of Attunement (Continued)

My partner and I wrote a poem together which we engraved on some cedar wood with a \$20.00 wood-burning tool. This little wheel sits on top of the larger wheel. I think the poem captures the essence of my alternative to Christmas holiday:

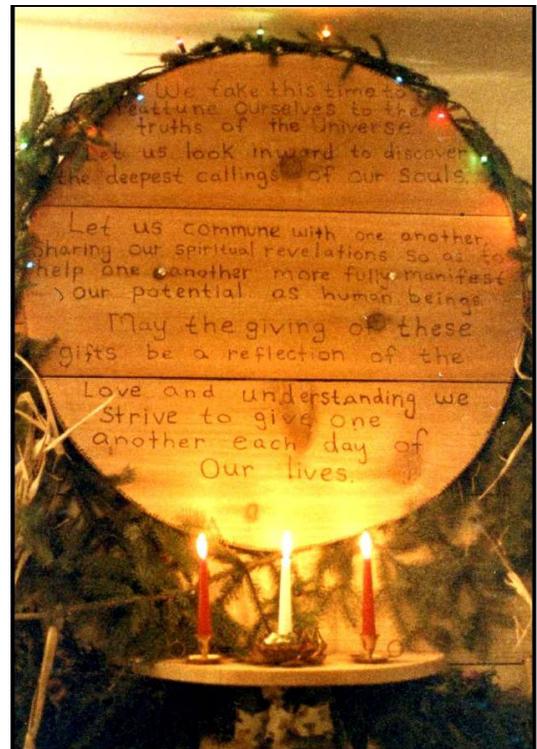
WEEK OF ATTUNEMENT PRAYER

We take this time to re-attune ourselves to the truths of the universe.

Let us look inward to discover the deepest callings of our souls.

Let us commune with one another, sharing our spiritual revelations, so as to help one another more fully manifest our potential as human beings.

May the giving of these gifts be a symbol of the love and understanding we strive to give one another each day of our lives.



Week of Attunement (Continued)

We decided to have the blinking light because it was a way of having some continuity. I have so many memories of lying in front of Christmas trees through the years and watching the lights. These are very warm, pleasant memories, and it feels really nice to have a connection to that past, while feeling very excited and satisfied that my holiday celebration has evolved to reflect my growth and change as a person. Instead of stockings, we each hung a basket on the wheel. In the baskets, we put the non-material gifts we are giving to each other in the coming year--things like love letters, notes of appreciation, and pledges to one another for the coming year.

We both agree our attunement wheel has all the wonderful aspects of a Christmas tree without its negative ones. We can still go out as a family and chop down a tree together. Or better yet, we can just cut a few branches off of several large pine trees. This way the tree does not die. No doubt the children we intend to have will have many beautiful memories about decorating attunement wheels through the years. Most importantly, my attunement wheel is not a symbol of Christianity. The wheel is a great stimulus for discussion, too. When people come over, they ask about it, and I have the opportunity to talk with them about the changes I have undergone regarding rituals.

Since the year of our first attunement wheel, we moved to a smaller house and had difficulty finding room for a seven-foot wheel. So I adapted the idea to fit a smaller space. I created an attunement "shrine". It had all the same characteristics of the wheel, but was designed to fit into a corner of the room, so that there was room for the holiday guests.

Week of Attunement (Continued)



**An
Attunement
Shrine**



The next part of the holiday I wanted to give some thought to was the holiday dinner. I still wanted to get together with my extended family for dinner, yet there were some changes I longed to make. Since I had been a vegetarian for ten years, I no longer felt comfortable serving ham or turkey for holiday dinners. I, therefore, discussed with my family how they would feel about eating something vegetarian for "Christmas" dinner. I happily discovered that my family was open to the idea of vegetarian dinners for the holidays when it was my turn to have the family dinner at my house. I am having lots of fun trying to think up fancy, festive dinners like artichokes stuffed with wild rice pilaf and Italian dipping sauce.

Week of Attunement (Continued)

However, on the other side of my family, is my father-in-law, whom I have been unable to convert to vegetarianism, even for one day a year! He is willing, however, to make special baked beans for me without pork. My husband's (Yes, I got married during the course of writing this book) family also encourages me to add any vegetarian dishes I desire to the Christmas dinner table. I have great fun imitating my father-in-law's meat dishes with vegetarian counterparts.

The next Christmas custom that I found I had to adapt in order to suit my new holiday was singing Christmas carols. I realized it made no sense for me to continue singing songs about a Christ that I didn't even believe existed! Yet, I knew I would really miss this family singing. My family had sung Christmas carols together since I was old enough to sing. I therefore decided to put together a list of songs that my partner and I could begin designating as Week of Attunement songs that we could eventually teach our children. I'm sure you can come up with plenty of other songs that would work.

"Imagine" -- John Lennon

"Song of the Soul" --Cris Williamson

*"If I Had a Hammer" - Lee Hays &
Pete Seeger*

"All You Need Is Love" -- The Beatles

*"Shine On" -- Seth Bernard &
May Erlewine*

Week of Attunement (Continued)

After adapting various customs from Christmas, I then contemplated what spiritual activities I wanted to include in my Week of Attunement holiday. The gift-giving, singing, and dinner were all important, but I also wanted to deal with the spiritual aspect of the holiday.

I therefore added to my family celebration of Week of Attunement the practice of sitting together in a circle and reciting poems or inspirational readings, having to do with the concept of attunement. I have included three sample readings that I have used. There are, of course, an infinite number of poems/readings that one could use.

Readings for Week of Attunement

Untitled Poem

*I am called upon to, and am committed to,
bring myself and ourselves continually more into
harmony with Universe.*

*I am doing this by --
experimenting with ways of perceiving and
interacting with each other, with all be-ings,
Gaia and Universe,
Which, by the very nature of those ways,
create flow in the direction of*

*-- weave into be-ing-
-coming to balance.*

*Some of the ways I am now exploring include:
Learning/teaching who We are,
Naming, calling forth our best selves;
Nurturing the child within, the wonderment, the
playfulness;*

*Loving Universe/Ourselves, accepting what-is,
trusting;*

*Receiving, healing the hurts and imbalances,
forgiving, sharing, feeling, intuiting;*

*Celebrating, singing the be-ing, the life cycles,
the weaving of what-is;*

*Participating in life, giving, negotiating,
challenging,*

*risking, making mistakes, becoming humble, dis-
covering, empowering;*

*Honoring/"grokking" the gifts other beings offer
us in becoming our "food"*

*and the gifts we offer in each moment-by-
moment participation;*

*Listening for, and respecting all perspectives,
trying on the others' shoes,*

acknowledging and un-learning the assumptions

Acknowledging arrogance, creating space;

**Readings for
Week of
Attunement
(Continued)**

*Creating visions of the balance --
alternative energy sources,
appropriate technologies, local material-goods
production,
organic gardens, co-ops, re-cycling materials,
community, consensus decision-making,
"right livelihood,"
new (old?) languages of the spirit,
new (old) economies that support heart
values,
Re-discovering and Re-creating Our Place In The
Universe.*

*Christopher Coon, Unpublished Poem
Ann Arbor, Michigan (1984) Reprinted with
Permission.*

Readings for Week of Attunement (Continued)

Excerpt from Voluntary Simplicity

"The world is profoundly changing, that much seems clear. We have entered a time of great uncertainty that extends from local to global scale. We are forced by pressing circumstances to ask difficult questions about the way we live our lives. Will my present way of life still be workable when my children grow up? How might their lives, and my own, be different? Am I satisfied with my work? Does my work contribute to the well-being of others -- or is it just a source of income? How much income do I really require? Require for what? How much of my consumption adds to the clutter and complexity of my life rather than to my satisfaction? How does my level of consumption affect other people and the environment? Is there an alternative way of living that is more sustainable in an era of scarcity? Do I have the flexibility to adapt to a period of prolonged energy shortage and economic depression? In the face of scarcity, is there an alternative way of living that fosters cooperation and community rather than cutthroat competition and social fragmentation? Are there small changes that I could make in my own life that, with many others making similar changes, would result in a large difference in the well-being of others? What are my responsibilities to the other members of the human family who are living in grinding poverty? Am I missing much of the richness of life by being preoccupied with the search for social

Readings for Week of Attunement (Continued)

status and consumer goods? What is my purpose in life? How am I to take charge in my life?

...A quiet revolution has been stirring at the grass roots level of virtually every Western industrial nation. People from all walks of life have been experimenting with alternative ways of living that touch the world more lightly, more gently, more compassionately. In their own unique manner, teachers, factory workers, lawyers, carpenters, farmers, students, and many more have been exploring alternative ways of living. For the most part, these experiments in living have been modest and have not attracted much attention: A city dweller plants his first intensive garden; a suburban family insulates its home, begins to recycle bottles, cans and paper, and begins to shift its diet away from meat and highly processed foods; a student becomes a member of a consumer-owned food store, a lawyer learns carpentry as an alternative profession; a family decides not to buy a new car or a new television or a new dishwasher; and so on.

The majority of people who are undertaking these diverse and seemingly small experiments in simple living are not so much "purists" as they are "pioneers." They are persons who stand with a foot in two worlds -- with one foot in an unraveling industrial civilization and another foot in a newly arising post-industrial civilization. These are the "in-betweeners"--people who are bridging two worlds and making the

Readings for Week of Attunement (Continued)

transition from one dominant way of living to another. Their way of living is an amalgam, a blending of the old and the new into a more workable and meaningful alternative to the deteriorating status quo. The individual actions of these people may appear to be very modest responses to the serious concerns outlined at the start. Yet, actions such as these (recycling, changing one's diet, lowering one's level of consumption, etc.) represent an important beginning.

The character of a whole society is the cumulative result of countless small actions, day in and day out, of millions of persons. Who we are, as a society, is a synergistic accumulation of who we are as individuals. A society cannot move toward greater frugality any farther or any faster than we, as individuals, will support in our own lives.

Small changes are beautiful. Small changes that seem insignificant in isolation can be great contributions when they are simultaneously undertaken by many others. For example, if only a few people intentionally conserve gasoline (or some other precious resource), the effect will be minuscule. However, if a majority of persons were each to intentionally conserve a small amount of gasoline, the aggregate impact would be enormous. As this example suggests, the small decisions of daily life have become an immensely important arena of social action.

Our passage through life is not a neutral process. How we live our lives matters

Readings for Week of Attunement (Continued)

greatly. Each of us makes a difference. Just as boats of various designs leave very different wakes in the water behind them, so too do various approaches to living send out different waves of reverberating influence into the world. The disruptive wake that has been left by nearly two centuries of aggressive industrialization now threatens to swamp Western industrial nations and perhaps even the entire earth. In our highly interdependent, increasingly vulnerable world, the process of daily living has become an important skill for us to learn. We can no longer afford to be oblivious to the impact of our way of living on the rest of the world. The food we eat, the clothes that we wear, the work that we do, the technologies that we employ, the transportation that we use, the manner in which we relate to others, the "compassionate causes" that we support, the energy systems that we develop, the learning that we acquire, and many more are all vital to the well-being of the totality of life on this planet. Our lives themselves are a new frontier..."

Duane Elgin (1981) Voluntary Simplicity: Towards a Way of Life That is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich. New York, NY: William Morrow & Company, pp. 21-23.

**Readings for
Week of
Attunement
(Continued)**

**Chief Seattle's Statement to President
Franklin Pierce (1854) in Regards to Land
in Puget Sound, Washington.**

" How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them?

Every part of the earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing, and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people. The sap which courses through the trees carries the memories of the red man.

The white man's dead forget the country of their birth when they go to walk among the stars. Our dead never forget this beautiful earth, for it is the mother of the red man. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters; the deer, the horse, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the juices in the meadows, the body heat of the pony, and the man -- all belong to the same family.

So, when the Great Chief in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land, he asks much of us. The Great Chief sends word he will reserve us a place so that we can live comfortably to ourselves. He will be our father and we will be his children. So we will consider your offer to buy our land. But it will not be easy. For this land is sacred to us.

This shining water that moves in the streams and the rivers is not just water but the blood of our ancestors. If we sell you land, you must remember that it is sacred, and you must teach your children that it is sacred and that

**Readings for
Week of
Attunement
(Continued)**

each ghastly reflection in the clear water of the lakes tells of events and memories in the life of my people. The water's murmur is the voice of my father's father.

The rivers are our brothers, they quench our thirst. The rivers carry our canoes, and feed our children. If we sell you our land, you must remember, and teach your children, that the rivers are our brothers, and yours, and you must henceforth give the rivers the kindness you would give any brother.

We know that the white man does not understand our ways. One portion of land is the same to him as the next, for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land whatever he needs. The earth is not his brother but his enemy, and when he has conquered it, he moves on. He leaves his fathers' graves and his children's birthright is forgotten. He treats his mother, the earth, and his brother, the sky, as things to be bought, plundered, sold like sheep or bright beads. His appetite will devour the earth and leave behind only desert.

I do not know. Our ways are different from your ways. The sight of your cities pains the eyes of the red man. But perhaps it is because the red man is a savage and does not understand. There is no quiet place in the white man's cities.

No place to hear the unfurling leaves in the spring, or the rustle of an insect's wings. But perhaps it is because I am savage and do not understand. The clatter only seems to insult the ears. And what is there to life if a man cannot hear the lonely cry of the whippoorwill or the arguments of the frogs around a pond at

**Readings for
Week of
Attunement
(Continued)**

night? I am a red man and do not understand. The Indian prefers the soft sound of the wind darting over the face of a pond, and the smell of the wind itself, cleansed by rain or scented with the pine cone.

The air is precious to the red man, for all things share the same breath. The white man, they all share the same breath. The white man does not notice the air he breaths. Like a man dying for many days, he is numb to the stench. But if we sell you our land, you must remember that the air is precious to us, that the air shares its spirit with all the life it supports. The wind that gave our grandfather his first breath also received his last sigh. And if we sell you our land you must keep it apart and sacred, as a place where even the white man can go and taste the wind that is sweetened by the meadow's flowers.

So we will consider your offer to buy our land. If we decide to accept I will make one condition. The white man must treat the beasts of this land as his brothers. I am savage and do not understand any other way. I have seen a thousand rotting buffaloes on the prairie, left by the white man who shot them from a passing train. I am savage and do not understand how the smoking iron horse can be more important than the buffalo that we kill only to stay alive.

What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, man would die from a great loneliness of spirit. For whatever happens to the beasts, soon happens to man. All things are connected. You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of our grandfathers. So that they will respect

Readings for Week of Attunement (Continued)

the land, tell your children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin. Teach your children what we have taught our children, that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

Even the white man, whose God walks and talks with him as a friend, cannot be exempt from the common destiny. We may be brothers after all. We shall see. One thing we know, which the white man may one day discover--our God is the same God. You may think now that you own Him, as you wish to own our land; but you cannot. He is the God of man and his compassion is equal for the red man and the white. The earth is precious to him, and to harm the earth is to heap contempt upon its Creator. The Whites, too, shall pass; perhaps sooner than all other tribes. Contaminate your bed, and you will one night suffocate in your own waste.

But in your perishing, you will shine rightly, fired by the strength of the God who brought you to this land and for some special purpose gave you dominion over this land and over the red man. That destiny is a mystery to us, for we do not understand when the buffalo are slaughtered, the wild horses are tamed, the secret corners of the forest heavy with the scent of many men, and the view of the ripe hills blotted out by talking wires. Where is the thicket? Gone. Where is the eagle? Gone.

Readings for Week of Attunement (Continued)

In the future, I hope to expand my private family ritual of reading poems together into some kind of community service. It feels very good to have made all these changes in regards to celebrating Christmas. I now look forward to "Week of Attunement." Instead of my holiday feeling alienating and frustrating, it feels empowering and fun. Instead of swallowing my disagreements about Christianity, I am making a statement against it in a positive way.

My mother and siblings, and my husband's family, still celebrate Christmas traditionally, and very much desire for us to participate. It is not a problem for me to continue to participate in their celebrations. I love my family, and want to maintain my closeness with them. However, I am clear, in my own mind, that it is only for their benefit that I continue to acknowledge Christian holidays. Since I have my own alternative celebration, in my own home, with my husband, my needs are taken care of. Also, when my extended family comes to visit at our house during the holidays, they get a little taste of my alternative ways of doing things, which they actually seem to quite enjoy. It seems I've found a way to work it out so that "everybody's happy."

JANUARY

New Year's Eve/Day

The idea of a holiday to usher out the old year, and welcome in the new year, is centuries old. The ancient Pagan New Year's celebration was on October 31st, as November 1st was the beginning of the new year, according to the Celtic calendar. As I was re-evaluating how I should celebrate New Year's Eve/Day, I realized that it was one of the few holidays of our culture that had no political or religious connotations. I, therefore, was free to consider the idea of a New Year's celebration at face value. I concluded that, theoretically, a celebration for the new year is a totally sensible concept, with a lot of potential for fun. Yet, when I considered how this holiday is typically celebrated in this country, I realized that it wasn't, in fact, a very positive experience. Though I had no philosophical disagreements about New Year's as a holiday, I had some definite problems with how we, in this culture, go about celebrating it.

The first problem I have with typical New Year's celebrations in this country is the abuse of alcohol that almost always accompanies New Year's parties. It is common knowledge that we have a very serious alcohol abuse problem in this country, and New Year's parties are usually a disgusting, depressing example of this problem. I was so fed up with alcohol abuse that I concluded it was time for me to figure out a way to have an alcohol-free New Year's celebration.

When I thought about it, I also had some concerns about the holiday having no spiritual basis at all. It seemed to me that beginning a new year cries out for some spiritual

New Year's Eve/Day (Continued)

introspection, yet few people do this. I, therefore, decided to redesign my New Year's holiday observance to include some serious introspection about beginning a new year of my life. Since I was also in the process of revamping the ways I celebrate Christmas, and New Year's and Christmas fall so close together, I decided to just lump them together as one week-long holiday, which I called Week of Attunement.

I hope the following information can serve as some stimulating food for thought for readers who are dissatisfied with the traditional ways of ushering in the New Year, and interested in developing some exciting alternatives.

New Year's Meditation Exercises

In order to add a spiritual component to the New Year's holiday, I incorporated some structured introspective exercises into my holiday observation. I engage in them during the days between Christmas and New Year's Eve. I think of them as a way to tune into the God/Goddess within. I have come to believe that, the more we can learn to get in touch with this "higher self", the more peace and happiness we will find in living our lives. It's so easy to get caught up in a hectic lifestyle that leaves little time for spiritual contemplation. A holiday like New Year's can be a welcome opportunity to declare a few days "off" from your regular life to engage in self-reflection.

Reflection can be done in a very unstructured way, for example, just sitting quietly in a Yoga position, or listening to soft music. However, I find that more structured kinds of introspection work better for me. Thus, for several years, I have used "Values Clarification" techniques. Values Clarification is a simple technique developed by Louis Raths, which consists of open ended questions that prompt you to think deeply about yourself, your life, and existence in general. Particularly, as the name implies, it helps you focus on what you value. It's a simple technique, and you can use many kinds of questions. I have included, below, some questions that I have developed which I think are particularly fitting for a New Year's meditation ritual. This can be done in your own home, but if finances permit, you might find the experience enhanced by renting a secluded heated cabin, or even a room in a lodge, or hotel out in the country. Another possibility is to volunteer to house-sit for a

New Year's Meditation Exercises (Continued)

friend or relative who is out of town for the holidays, so you can be in a new environment where you're not as likely to be distracted, as in your own home.

Questions for Meditating Upon the Past Year and Preparing for the New.

1) The three most fun experiences I had this past year were. . .

2) The three most painful experiences I had this past year were... What I learned from them were...

3) The five accomplishments I feel happy about achieving this year are...

4) Some positive changes I've made in my relationships with people this year are...

5) Five important things I've learned about myself this past year are...

6) Three positive changes in my lifestyle that I've made this year are...

7) Some gifts or contributions that I've made to other people/the world this past year are...

8) Some things that come to mind that I wanted to do this past year that I didn't have time for are...

New Year's Meditation Exercises (Continued)

9) *If I were not limited by time, energy, or money, I would do the following fifty things (include both fun activities and accomplishments.*

10) *If I had only this coming year to live, how would I spend it?*

11) *Am I living in harmony with the planet? In what ways can I change the way I live to "walk more lightly on the earth?"*

I spend as much time as I need on these questions. I then try to move my focus from the specifics of my life towards the broader underlying issues.

1) *What do I understand the purpose of my life to be, in a broader spiritual sense?*

2) *When, during the last year, have I felt the most in harmony with that purpose? The most out of harmony?*

3) *What changes can I make in the ways I am living, to bring myself more in tune with that purpose, as I understand it?*

After completing these exercises, and engaging in some nice relaxing activities, like hiking in the woods, listening to music, doing some baking etc., I formulate my goals for the new year. I have found that New Year's goals that I set after really taking time out

New Year's Meditation Exercises (Continued)

to meditate on my life in a wholistic way, feel very different than typical "New Year's Resolutions." Most new year's resolutions seem to be used for self flagellation. They are often unrealistic, and not made from the heart, and therefore doomed to failure. When people make goals for the new year after an in-depth examination of their personal experiences and their deepest values, they are much more likely to accomplish their goals.

Group Attunement Meeting

Some people find that participating in self-reflection works better for them when done within a small group context. The nurturing and support people can receive from other group members, as well as the intellectual stimulation of examining ideas with others, makes group experiences a rich environment for increasing one's self-awareness. Perhaps many of you have participated in such "personal growth" groups at various times, but I bet you've never thought of incorporating this as part of a New Year's ritual.

I did not come up with this idea either. I was fortunate enough to be acquainted with two amazing therapists (Bob and Margaret Blood) who for many years conducted New Year's workshops. I have, with their permission, included the following description of their workshop:

Group Attunement Meeting (Continued)

This workshop is for those who wish to take time out to use the turn of the year as an occasion for personal reflection and meaningful sharing. We will review the journeys we have traveled during the past year to see what we have learned. We will re-assess our priorities to discover whether we are spending our energies in the ways in which we feel most deeply called. We will dare to express our hopes for the year ahead, and will envision the steps we can take to make those hopes come true. Throughout the weekend, we will balance our serious work with joyful celebration of the gift of another year. . . . We hope to leave the workshop refreshed and inspired by our own individual work, by our insights into the lives of others, and by the atmosphere of warmth and caring.

Bob and Margaret Blood, December (1985) Ann Arbor, Michigan. (Reprinted with permission.)

Bob and Margaret's weekend workshop was interspersed with dancing, group massage, saunas, dream analysis, etc.

Such a group meditative experience can be used in lieu of exercises done alone. If this kind of group experience sounds inviting to you, check out if anyone is offering such an option in your area. If not, you might form a group of people interested in such a workshop and look in the yellow pages or the internet for therapists, social workers, or counselors

Group Attunement Meeting (Continued)

and contract with someone to conduct such a New Year's workshop. There are also a variety of personal growth, meditation, educational retreat centers throughout the country you might check into. For instance, Omega Institute usually offers a New Year's Retreat. Omega is a great place -- an educational retreat center which combines Eastern and Western approaches to spiritual/psychological growth. Their contact information is:

Omega Institute
260 Lake Drive
Rhinebeck, New York 12572-3212
www.eomega.org

**Though Omega Institute is headquartered in upstate New York, they hold retreats at many different sites around the country.*

If you, or a friend, have personal experience conducting groups, you might also consider having the workshop be run by the participants, rotating the facilitation duties. The decision as to whether or not to hire a professional facilitator should be based on the group skills level of the participants.

Though you should certainly feel free to use your own ideas and imagination if you decide to conduct an Attunement group, I offer the following outline to give you some ideas of what has worked well for me.

Suggested Format Week of Attunement Group Meeting

Size:

I think this type of group functions best with six to ten people.

Time-frame:

I like to set up at least two four-hour sessions for the meeting, e.g., a morning and an afternoon session, with a break for lunch, or an overnight format. I have found the weekend or all-day format for group seminars more helpful than a one-night three-hour session, because there is enough time for the group to get acquainted, do some significant "work," and to wrap up the session.

Preparation:

I have found it is helpful to hand out written exercises to group participants before the group meeting. Last year, when I was the facilitator of the New Year's group meeting, I handed out the Values Clarification exercises that I use in my individual meditation (just discussed). As I stated earlier, I find these structured exercises very helpful, and in a group setting, they really help to focus the group's energies. Any questions that help people to focus on their past year's experiences, and what hopes and dreams they have for the coming year, will work.

Meeting Process:

It is difficult to capture in words the process of any group meeting. It is difficult to say, "First you do this, then this happens." Group process is flowing and spontaneous. However, what ultimately happens in a New

Week of Attunement Group Meeting (Continued)

Year's Attunement Group is that each member, in turn, shares their feelings about their life experiences over the past year. From there, group members help one another to "make sense" of those life experiences, and use the wisdom gained from them to set a course for the coming year.

Group members help one another with their goal setting in a variety of ways. First, group members provide one another with a supportive and therapeutic environment in which members can explore their innermost thoughts and feelings. Second, as group members listen to one another's dreams, goals, and hopes, they can serve as inspiration to one another.

Another important way group members help one another in setting up goals for the new year is that they confront one another when any group member attempts to set unrealistic, inappropriate goals for himself/herself. Everyone is all too familiar with the typical New Year's resolutions that are inevitably broken by February 1st. Group members can (gently) confront a member who seems to be setting goals to please or appease others, rather than setting goals that are truly from "the heart."

In summary, I have found it very helpful to have meditative exercises, either solitary or group oriented, as part of my New Year's ritual. I think it adds a sorely needed spiritual aspect to the holiday. Perhaps those of you who are accustomed to observing New Year's with dancing and gaiety might be wondering to yourself if the kind of dry, serious, kind of way of celebrating New Year's would really

Week of Attunement Group Meeting (Continued)

work for you. Well, I have some good news for you. I supplement this serious side of the holiday with some merry-making as well. I have discovered that, after I take care of the serious aspects of beginning a new year, I feel really cleansed, and have a desire to dance and rejoice as well. I think the reason most people do not really feel jolly at New Year's parties is because, subconsciously, they know they have neglected to do the psychological "work" they need to do. So, let me now share with you some ideas for an alternative New Year's party.

A Different Kind of New Year's Eve Party

Since I had made a commitment to redesign my New Year's celebration, I decided to try and put my full creative energies into it. So I started brainstorming. I just let my mind ponder. "If I could design the perfect, fantasy New Year's party, what would it be like?" I started a list of the necessary ingredients.

- 1) Smoke and alcohol free.
- 2) All ages could participate--so kids wouldn't be stuck home with babysitters. The option of bedding down the kids at the event, so parents could have some time to themselves.
- 3) Lots of really fun and exciting games and activities.

New Year's Eve Party (Continued)

- 4) Open to the public at large -- so it had a community feel to it.
- 5) Dancing on a non-crowded dance floor.
- 6) Affordable to most families.

What evolved after a whole lot of work (well worth it), was a Community New Year's Eve Extravaganza, coordinated by yours truly. I was a total novice at this sort of thing, but enthusiasm and commitment to an idea will take you a long way! Here's what this wonderful shindig (now going into its third year by popular demand) looked like.

Through the city parks and recreation department, I arranged to rent a large gymnasium and several large rooms of an elementary school. The cash outlay for this event was a little mind boggling to me at first. For instance, we had to pay the school janitor \$35.00/hr, and by the time we added up all the misc. expenses, the overhead ended up being about \$1500.00. We ended up losing \$300.00 the first year, but the second year we made \$20.00. After my husband and I put up all the money ourselves the first year, we discovered that the best strategy for planning an event like this is to have some organizational sponsors, or a group of people willing to risk a couple hundred dollars each.

After making the gym rental arrangements, my imagination began to run wild. The kid inside me was saying "This is going to be a blast -- figuring out a million and one ways to have fun with a bunch of people in a gym!"

New Year's Eve Party (Continued)

My mind immediately turned to the idea of "New Games." New games are a concept popularized by the renowned San Franciscan peace activist Stewart Brand. New games are described in The New Games Book by Andrew Fluegelman (Doubleday, 1976) as follows:

"Games are not so much a way to compare abilities as a way to celebrate them... By reexamining the basic idea of play, we could involve families, groups, and individuals in a joyous recreation experience that creates a sense of community and personal expression. People could center on the joy of playing, cooperating, and trusting, rather than striving to win." (p.10)

In the 1970's, the New Games Foundation held a number of "New Games Tournaments" in San Francisco. These were wondrous events with thousands of people of all ages romping and squealing with delight. So I began to picture an indoor winter version of a New Games tournament.

I spent hours pouring over The New Games Book, as well as several other similar books, i.e. The Cooperative Sports and Games Book by Terry Orlick (Pantheon Books, 1982). I selected the ones that tickled my "kid". We used "Snake in the Grass," "Paper, Rock, Scissors," and "Cooperative Musical Chairs," and they were a great success. I also came up with some original ideas that were a big hit, "Nerf Dodgeball," and "Silly Relays." Ever pushed an orange across the floor with your

New Year's Eve Party (Continued)

nose? My husband and I were in stitches in our living room as we tried out all the games, just to make sure they were as fun as they sounded. They were!

I wanted to include as many families as possible in my event, so I decided to create special, separate games for the 3-6 year olds. For instance, we used an idea out of one of the books, and had "blanket-rides" around the gym -- small children were pulled around the gym by older children or adults, and they were tickled pink. In addition to all the games in the gym, I also set up a room for more sedate games, like Euchre and Pictionary, and we had volleyball later in the evening.

As word got out into the community about what I was planning, people who were turned on by the idea began to contact me to volunteer their ideas and service. In Ann Arbor, we have a wonderful organization called The Scrap Box. This group collects all kinds of scrap materials from companies and individuals, and warehouses them. They then sell the materials at non-profit prices (a dollar for a shopping bag full of goodies) to art teachers, or any group or persons wanting to make creative use of the stuff. The Scrap Box informed me that they would be delighted to come to my party free of charge, with two huge tables of art supplies, so participants could make their own hats and noisemakers. This aspect of the event was a smashing success.

Lots of people stepped forward with their special gift. My sister, a physical education teacher, brought a Limbo pole and had a limbo contest, and directed people through

New Year's Eve Party (Continued)

with live guitar accompaniment! The idea feeds on itself. I cannot even begin to enumerate all the people who stepped forward to make the event a wonderful success.

I served as kind of the "master-mind" behind the whole event. A main concern of mine was to design a workable "flow" to the event. I was, thus, concerned with how to settle all these kids down after several hours of wild fun. I therefore turned it into kind of a huge slumber party. Kids could bring pillows and sleeping bags, and "bed down" to watch a movie. I wanted the event set up so the kids could be settled down and give the parents some time to dance. I, therefore, arranged to have child-care volunteers who worked for an hour for free admission. Parents could, thus watch the movie with their children, or leave them with the child-care workers and get some dancing in.

I tried to pick a real captivating movie which had wide appeal for all ages, and one which kids wouldn't mind re-watching if they'd already seen it. I used Willie Wonka and the Chocolate

Factory the first year, and a wonderful obscure movie entitled The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T the second year. The kids (and parents) loved them both. We had bed-time snacks, and the whole thing looked like a giant slumber party!

A New Year's Eve Extravaganza:



Parachute Games



Musical Chairs



Limbo



Hokey Pokey!!!



Circle Games



Blanket Rides

New Year's Eve Party (Continued)

I had dancing too, and let guests sign up to be a disk jockey for ½ hour intervals. When it was my turn to spin music, I made sure to include a polka, the bunny hop, a reggae tune, the chicken dance, and a grand march. These are fun dances that all generations can enjoy.

So this is how I've celebrated New Year's Eve for the past two years. The bad side of it is that I don't know how I'm ever going to get out of doing it! People are already approaching me (It's June) and inquiring, "Are you going to do your New Year's thing again this year? I heard it was great!" I hope to continue doing it, but it is really a lot of work. My husband and I both have to take three days off work to pull it off. But, if I decide it's too much for me to continue doing, I hope I can turn it over to other enthused people, to carry on the tradition. I certainly believe, from the bottom of my heart, that it is worth all the work. So many kids and adults came up to me teary eyed and told me it was the best New Year's Eve of their whole lives.

This kind of event really does get people inspired and excited about entering a new year. I ended both of the parties with a midnight sing-a-long, where I had everyone get in a big circle and sing songs like "Song of the Soul" by Chris Williamson or "Shine On" by Seth & May. People left feeling connected with their friends and neighbors and feeling good about being alive! It certainly seems that that's how everyone should start every new year!

I have discovered that other people, in other cities, were designing New Year's

New Year's Eve Party (Continued)

festivals similar to what I had dreamed up. A group of people in Boston started something called "First Night Celebration," and I've discovered many local communities have started similar celebrations. The focus of these New Year's celebrations is very similar to mine -- a family oriented, alcohol-free, community celebration. Some of these events are quite large-scale, involving many civic groups and businesses. They are often subsidized by city governments, and/or have several corporate sponsors.

These large events are set up so that participants buy a badge costing anywhere from \$8.00 to \$20.00. Participants can then go to as many events as they choose. The event is held in a variety of churches and public and private buildings within walking distance of one another. In larger cities, shuttle buses are provided. There is quite a variety of events to choose from: puppet shows, clown shows, story reading, etc. for children, as well as dancing, musical concerts and dramatic performances geared towards adults. If this idea appeals to you just look up First Night Celebrations on the internet to get idea of how to organize one in the town you live in. It's really not difficult to get something like this started in your town, I did it with no experience. I think you will find many performers who are willing to donate their time, because it's great publicity for them.

JANUARY/FEBRUARY

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s; Abraham Lincoln's; George Washington's; Birthdays

Let me start with a discussion of Martin Luther King Jr's birthday. I think that Martin Luther King Jr. was an amazing man who was able to inspire this country to make some desperately needed changes regarding racial inequality. I also deeply admire his non-violent approach. We have come a long way since Dr. King's early work regarding racial discrimination. How amazing that we have now had an African American president. Of course there is still lots of work to be done to bring about true racial equality. Which brings me to a bit of a problem with the holiday.

I am concerned that we are taught to narrowly focus our admiration, and idolize a few people, and ignore the many other people who contribute to a given struggle or social issue. I do not support the idea of heroization. Through the years, I have become more and more uncomfortable singling out particular people and bestowing upon them the credit and glory for accomplishments that are, in fact, the result of the total efforts of humanity--built from hour to hour, year to year, and century to century.

Heroization, becomes obvious if you examine an "alternative" calendar, i.e. one that commemorates women, Blacks, social activists, etc. On these calendars, **each day** commemorates people who have made contributions through the centuries toward goals such as peace, democracy, racial equality, women's equality, respect for the environment, etc. Here are a few examples

Abraham Lincoln's; George Washington's; Birthdays (Continued)

from alternative calendars to demonstrate my point.

January 21: Margaret Brent becomes the first American woman to claim the right to vote -- 1647.

September 1: Gabriel Prusser, Virginia slave, leads mass revolt -- 1800.

November 20: A landing party of seventy-eight Indians calling themselves "Indians of All Tribes" occupy Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay demanding that the land be returned to the Indians. This event gives new life to the Native American Rights Movement -- 1969.

May27: Rachel Carson, writer, environmentalist, born 1907

July 12: Henry David Thoreau, poet, writer, born 1817.

All of the above people made great contributions to our country, but we do not celebrate their birthdays as national holidays.

Let me move on to George Washington's birthday. George Washington is "heroized" in our culture because he was our first president and played a significant role in setting up the democratic structure of our government. In certain ways, I do respect the efforts of George Washington, and the other creators of our governmental structure. However, I can't help but also feel a certain amount of anger at Washington's (as well as the other founders') bigotry and sexism. Washington's concern for

**Martin Luther King, Jr.'s;
Abraham Lincoln's;
George Washington's;
Birthdays
(Continued)**

equality and justice did not extend to women, Blacks, or Native Americans. The constitution Washington helped create guaranteed freedom and equality to white males. As a matter of fact, George Washington, being a wealthy land-owner with disdain for the poor, favored land ownership as a prerequisite for voting privileges! I do not mean to make George Washington into a terrible villain. I realize he lived in an era of unquestioned racism and sexism. I guess I just don't, as a woman living in the 21st century identify enough with George Washington to single out his birthday as a holiday.

Likewise with Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln of course made a tremendous contribution to racial equality by ending slavery. However, that too was a process that involved many people, and the struggle continues today. Given that I am opposed to the idea of heroization, I decided I wanted to design a holiday that focused on the idea of equality rather than on a few of the leaders who were involved in that struggle. I also wanted to broaden the focus of the holiday to include equal rights for people all around the planet, not just in my own country. I therefore developed a new holiday which I named Equality Day. In my life, Equality Day replaces Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, Presidents' Day and the 4th of July.

Equality Day

Equality Day

*[*Replaces 4th of July, President's Day, & Martin Luther King Jr's Birthday]*

I am sure I will still take a few moments to give thanks to leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. during my Equality Day observation, but I will also want to acknowledge and appreciate other people involved in the continuing struggle for equality.

I use this holiday to educate myself about issues of oppression or discrimination both on national level and international level. The inequality can have to do with male/female inequalities, racial or ethnic inequalities, and inequalities in terms of access to economic resources. I have always felt that political change begins with personal changes in consciousness, so I use this holiday to raise my own consciousness about a broad range of equality issues around the world. I buy three books and read them cover to cover within three months. Sadly, there are always inequality issues brewing throughout the world, so it is not difficult to find books to read.

Here are some of books you might want to consider reading if you like this idea of Equality Day as an alternative holiday:

SUGGESTED READING LIST FOR EQUALITY DAY

Walking in Their Shoes –Can One Person Change the World?, Jim Ziolkowski

Long Walk to Freedom, Nelson Mandela

What's Going On?, Nathan McCail

Equality Day (Continued)

The Autobiography of Malcolm X, As Told to Alex Haley

The Tyranny of Experts—Economists, Dictators, and the Forgotten Rights of the Poor, William Easterly

The Bill of the Century—The Epic Battle for the Civil Rights Act, Clay Risen

Palestine—History of a Lost Nation, Karl Sabbagh

How Could This Happen? Explaining the Holocaust, Dan McMillan

Half the Sky, Turning Oppression Into Opportunity for Women Worldwide, Nicholas Kristof & Sheryl_WuDunn

Factory Girls—From Village to City in a Changing China, Leslie Chang

This Indian Country—American Indian Activists and the Place They Made, Fredrick Hoxie

Souls of My Sisters—Black Women Break Their Silence, Tell Their Stories and Heal Their Spirits, Dawn Marie Daniels & Candace Sardy

A Call to Action—Women, Religion, Violence & Power, Jimmy Carter

Speaking Truth to Power, Anita Hill

Do They Hear You When You Cry?, Fauziya Kassindja

Equality Day (Continued)

Devotion & Defiance, Humaira Awais Shahid

The Working Poor, Invisible America, David Shipler

The Impossible Takes a Little While, Paul Rogat Loeb

So Rich, So Poor, Why It's So Hard to End Poverty in America, Peter Edelman

The New Jim Crow-- Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, Michelle Alexander

Bad Samaritans: Rich Nations, Poor Policies and the Threat to the Developing World - HaJooh Change

Fighting for a Livable Wage -- Stephanie Luce

Class Matters - The New York Times

This Land is ~~You're~~ Their Land - Barbara Ehrenreich

As a family, you can also share poems or inspirational readings about issues of equality as part of your Equality Day Observation. The following two that I have used that I find incredibly inspiring. I have them hanging in my living room:

Ten Reasons for Choosing a Simpler Lifestyle

- 1) As an act of faith performed for the sake of personal integrity and as an expression of a personal commitment to a more equitable distribution of the world's resources.
- 2) As an act of self-defense against the mind and body polluting effects of over-consumption.
- 3) As an act of withdrawal from the achievement neurosis of our high-pressure, materialistic societies.
- 4) As an act of solidarity with the majority of humankind, which has no choice about lifestyle.
- 5) As an act of *sharing* with others what has been given to us, or of returning what was usurped by us through unjust social and economic structures.
- 6) As an act of celebration of the riches found in creativity, spirituality, and community with others, rather than in mindless materialism.
- 7) As an act of provocation (ostentatious under-consumption) to arouse curiosity leading to dialog with others about affluence, alienation, poverty, and social injustice.
- 8) As an act of anticipation of the era when the self-confidence and assertiveness of the under-privileged forces new power relationships and new patterns of resource allocation upon us.
- 9) As an act of advocacy of legislative changes in present patterns of production and consumption, in the direction of a new international economic order.
- 10) As an exercise of purchasing power to redirect production away from satisfaction of artificially created wants, towards the supplying of goods and services that meet genuine social needs.

Jorgen Lissner
United Nations Resident Coordinator

The Shakertown Pledge

Recognizing that the earth and the fullness thereof is a gift from our gracious God, and that we are called to cherish, nurture, and provide loving stewardship for the earth's resources,

And recognizing that life itself is a gift, and a call to responsibility, joy, and celebration, I make the following declarations:

- 1. I declare myself to be a world citizen.*
- 2. I commit myself to lead an ecologically sound life.*
- 3. I commit myself to lead a life of creative simplicity, and to share my personal wealth with the world's poor.*
- 4. I commit myself to join with others in the reshaping of institutions, in order to bring about a more just global society, in which all people have full access to the needed resources for their physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual growth.*
- 5. I commit myself to occupational accountability, and so doing, I will seek to avoid the creation of products which cause harm to others.*
- 6. I affirm the gift of my body, and commit myself to its proper nourishment, and physical well-being.*
- 7. I commit myself to examine continually my relations with others, and to attempt to relate honestly, morally, and lovingly to those around me.*
- 8.. I commit myself to personal renewal through prayer, meditation, and study.*
- 9. I commit myself to responsible participation in a community of faith.*

Adam Daniel Finnerty (1977) No More Plastic Jesus. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, p. 97. Reprinted with Permission.

Valentine's Day

In order to evaluate whether I wanted to continue celebrating Valentine's Day, I had to research the historical origins of the holiday since I was unfamiliar with how, and why, Valentine's Day came into being. I discovered that Valentine's Day was one of several holidays practiced long before there were reliable written records. Thus, the meaning and significance of the holiday are somewhat difficult to determine. After consulting a variety of source books on the subject, I found it impossible to determine which of the various explanations was the correct one. I suspect there is some truth, and some distortion, in each of them. I have listed below the most accepted explanations for the holiday's origin.

1) Saint Valentine is believed to have been a priest under Roman Emperor Claudius. The emperor was having difficulty getting soldiers to go to war because they did not want to leave their wives. The emperor therefore outlawed all marriages and engagements. Valentine defied the emperor's decree and secretly married couples. He was caught and jailed, and died in prison. Thus, Valentine emerged as the patron saint of lovers.

2) Another version is that Saint Valentine was imprisoned for helping Christians. While in prison, he and the jailer's daughter fell in love, and exchanged love letters, which he signed "Your Valentine." Thus, Saint Valentine was linked to the idea of passionate, romantic love transcending all political, religious, and practical considerations.

Valentine's Day (Continued)

3) It is a long held belief in Europe that February 14th is the time when birds choose their mates. Thus, the custom arose of people choosing their spouses on February 14th.

4) There was a Roman feast called Lupercalia which was celebrated on February 14th. During this feast, all the young women's names were put into a box and drawn by the young men. The couples would then be partners for the festivals, and the young man was supposed to act as a suitor to the young lady for the remainder of the year. This custom was very popular for several centuries. As Christianity took root, this custom was discouraged. The church forbade the practice, and instead put the names of saints in the boxes. The young man would then draw the name of a saint, and he was then supposed to try to emulate that saint in the coming year.

Having familiarized myself with the historical origins of Valentine's Day, I concluded that it seemed to have rather admirable, or at least harmless, origins. There was no political or religious meaning attached to the holiday that I found offensive. I consider romantic, passionate love to be one of the greatest joys of my life, so I decided to continue celebrating this holiday.

However, I do have a lot of disagreements with the way the holiday is commonly practiced in the United States today. Like many holidays in this country, Valentine's Day has become heavily commercialized. Spend,

Valentine's Day (Continued)

spend, spend has become the major focus of the holiday. There seems to be no limit to the number of red trinkets, clothes, etc., that one is encouraged to buy for one's "valentine," lest they feel unloved. The idea of receiving red lace negligees, and having my lover spend a hundred dollars on a fancy dinner, has never appealed to me.

I have always celebrated Valentine's Day by exchanging small presents, perhaps a book or record, and cooking a nice dinner with my partner at home. At times when I've had no lover, I have always tried to get together with another single friend for dinner, so I didn't sit around and get depressed because "nobody loves me."

Reconsidering this holiday during the process of writing this book prompted me to come up with some ideas to improve my celebration of this holiday. I began thinking about the fact that it takes a lot more than romantic dinners and nice presents to keep passionate, romantic love alive and well. I thought what a good idea it would be to include some personal growth, or self-awareness, exercises as part of the holiday ritual. Valentine's Day could be a time for lovers to really talk about their relationship, a time to talk about steps they could take in the coming year to nurture their love. Here are some examples:

1) Share qualities you really like about each other.

2) Share three fears you have about your relationship, and ideas for dealing dealing with those fears.

Valentine's Day (Continued)

3) *Write down five fun activities you would like to do together in the coming year.*

4) *Discuss ideas to nurture romantic, sexy feelings in your relationship, i.e. taking a massage class, planning several weekend getaways for the coming year, etc.*

Another idea for celebrating Valentine's Day is to get together with a group of friends, and plan a Valentine's Day dance. Last year, I held a Valentine's Day dance with all "Big Band" era music, because I am really into swing dancing. It was great fun. I charged \$15.00/couple and provided friends and the community with a smoke and alcohol-free dance, with natural foods refreshments! Since it was a private dance, my lesbian and gay friends felt totally comfortable attending, which was great. My friends had fun baking cookies, and inventing an "all-natural" punch for the dance, and I enjoyed playing waltz, polka, and swing music all night. I didn't make any money, by the time I rented the small hall and sound system, but I just did it for the fun of it. My husband and I remember it as our most romantic Valentine's Day ever.

I hope you find these suggestions for ways to celebrate Valentine's Day helpful. It really can be a fun, uplifting kind of holiday. Considering the frantic pace at which most dual career families are forced to live their lives, a little romantic time together is definitely something to be treasured!

MARCH/APRIL

Easter/Good Friday

I, like most everyone in our Christianity-dominated culture, was quite familiar with the origins of Easter as a holiday, and I celebrated it as a major holiday. However, as my beliefs began diverging from the teachings of Christianity, I became more and more uncomfortable with the idea of celebrating Easter. The entire basis of Easter is the commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus as the long-awaited Christ.

I'm not entirely certain how I view Jesus at this point in my life. I think it's possible that he is a purely mythical figure. Human beings, the world over, have created Gods to try and make sense of the mysteries of life since the millennium. Existence on this planet can feel so painful sometimes that we long for an explanation that will ease our pain, confusion and uncertainty. The story of Jesus is, without a doubt, one of the most comforting myths ever written.

I also think it is possible that Jesus was a real person; a brilliant philosopher and social activist. If I sift out the references to divinity when I read the parables of Jesus, I see a radical thinker; a man with revolutionary ideas, like turning the other cheek, forgiving others their wrongs, and sharing one's resources with the poor. However, I have some serious disagreements with some of Jesus' teachings, particularly his assertions that his followers should accept all he said as the word of God without debate or question. Perhaps Jesus' teachings were distorted and contaminated through others' interpretations and too many translations. The important point is I do not believe in Jesus as the resurrected savior of humanity, and therefore do not want to celebrate a holiday that

MARCH/APRIL Easter/Good Friday

portrays him as such.

I therefore decided to design an alternative spring holiday. In order to design my spring holiday, I decided to research ancient spring holidays to generate some ideas. In a book entitled The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets by Barbara Walker, (Harper & Row, 1983) I found the following information about Easter. Easter was originally a pagan springtime sacrificial ritual, named for the Saxon goddess Eostre. Easter was celebrated the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox. It was believed that the goddess Eostre passed into her fertile season at this time. Easter eggs were symbols of fertility. Even the Easter bunny was a pagan concept -- originally the sacred hare of the goddess. The pagan ritual was later Christianized.

It appears to me that both the Christian myths of the re-birth of Jesus as well as the goddess-centered myths surrounding the Goddess Eostre were attempts to express the rejuvenation and re-birth, of nature that is so overwhelmingly apparent each spring. I, too, felt a need for some kind of spring holiday. However, I did not believe in Christian doctrine regarding Easter, and I did not really identify with the ancient Pagan myths, either. Therefore, as an alternative holiday to Easter, I decided to simply begin celebrating the Spring Equinox as my spring holiday.

Alternative Holiday: Spring Equinox

Celebrating the solstices and equinoxes is becoming quite common in places where the so-called "counter-culture" flourishes. Thus, in Ann Arbor, one is often wished "Happy Spring Equinox" in place of "Happy Easter," or greeted in December with "Happy Solstice" in place of "Merry Christmas." I have found the earth's seasonal cycles to be an excellent basis for holiday celebrations.

For several years, I have celebrated the solstices and equinoxes by getting together with friends for pot-luck dinners. We celebrate by reading poems together. On the following page you will find a poem which I wrote and read at a Spring Equinox celebration several years ago, will, I think, give you a sense of the meaning of the holiday.

A Poem For A Spring Equinox Celebration

*Today we come together to
rejoice in the reawakening of the earth.
We again witness the Divine harmony of the
seasons of our planet.
We are filled with a sense of wonderment
and awe,
As we witness this miraculous rebirth of life.*

*Let us, like the earth, reawaken to the joy and
wonder of our lives.
Let us call forth now, the seeds we have long
nurtured within ourselves.
May the warm sunshine help us to bring our
dreams and aspirations to fruition.*

Alternative Holiday: Spring Equinox (Continued)

*As the earth in the spring provides for the needs of all living beings,
By giving warm rains and sunshine, that all will be nurtured and grow,*

*We must remember to provide one another with what we need to blossom and grow:
Love, support, encouragement, forgiveness and patience.*

*Let us take this time to express through song and dance,
Our love for our beautiful planet,
And our joy in existence.*

Another part of my Equinox and Solstice celebrations includes making goals for myself in terms of leading a lifestyle more respectful of the planet. If everyone makes small changes in their lifestyles, we can repair some of the ecological damage to the planet. Some examples of "walk lighter on the earth" goals are:

- 1) Turn your thermostat down, and wear a sweater.*
- 2) Start a compost pile and small garden.*
- 3) Sell the second family car and ride pool, or ride your bike to work.*
- 4) Reduce your air travel. How about a camping vacation nearer to home?*

Alternative Holiday: Spring Equinox (Continued)

I have found that continually setting goals to lead a more "voluntary simplicity" lifestyle not only helps the earth, but also my own spiritual and psychological well being.

I am very fond of dancing, so I try to incorporate dance into my holiday celebrations whenever possible. Dancing is an excellent means of celebrating holidays. Yet, in our culture, dancing is seriously lacking in most of our holiday celebrations. The type of dancing I have found most suited for holiday celebrations is "contra dancing." Contra dancing is similar to square dancing only much easier. Contra dancing is perfect for community holiday celebrations, because it is very joyous and uplifting, it can be done by people of all ages, and it fosters a tremendous sense of community. In addition, contra dancing satisfies a very important human need: touching. Contra dancing provides the opportunity for lots of touching: men with men, women with women, as well as women with men.

A group of folks in Ann Arbor have organized an all-night Spring Contra Dance for over thirty years. Child-care is provided, and several bands are brought in from around the country. I try to make it to this gala event every year as part of my celebration to welcome back the Spring.

If holiday contra dancing sounds appealing to you, find out if there are any contra dances held in your community. Just punch up "contra dancing" on the internet and there is lots of information. If not, you can organize one. You can hire a folk music group, complete with a contra dance caller and teacher, for a few hundred dollars. Rent a

Alternative Holiday: Spring Equinox (Continued)

school gymnasium, or small hall, and charge participants a small admission fee to cover costs. (Eight dollars is average for contra dance admission.) I think you will find many eager contra dancers out there!

If you want to try something that's less hard work, consider this. My husband and I celebrated Spring one year by going out on the tennis courts near our apartment complex, at dawn, with a tape recorder. We danced Polkas, Waltzes and Schottisches all by ourselves in the early morning sun. It was wonderful!

MAY May Day

A discussion of May Day is included under the discussion of Labor Day.

Memorial Day

In my childhood, Memorial Day was mostly a day of picnics, and perhaps the first swim of the season in the lake. The political meaning of the holiday was never really addressed. I had a vague understanding that the day was supposed to be for honoring soldiers lost in all the wars. As a post World War II, pre-Vietnam child, I really had little sense of soldiers or war. The best I could make out of it all was that the world had "bad guys" in it and sometimes our "good guy" soldiers got killed in the process of defending us from the bad guys. On Memorial Day, people honored the dead soldiers by putting flags and flowers on their graves.

Memorial Day

(Continued)

As I grew older, war became part of my reality, as the Vietnam War unfolded in my living room in living color. War protests became part of my reality, too, and I began to try and sift through my conflicting thoughts and feelings about war. I found myself trying to find a foothold that felt right. My position on war seemed to settle in somewhere between "dyed in the wool pacifism" and "God is on our side patriotism". Let me give a brief summary of my sentiments about war because it will explain the rationale behind the alternative holiday I am proposing for Memorial Day.

My readings and explorations regarding the subject of war left me with the conclusion that most wars are caused by:

- 1) Conflict over resources.
- 2) Unwillingness to accept religious and cultural differences.
- 3) The belief that it is acceptable to use violence to resolve conflict.

Conflict over resources is the underlying cause for the majority of wars. It is, however, a motive that human beings are reluctant to admit to, so the motives of war tend to be disguised. Wars are said to be fought for more noble things; things considered worthy of fighting and dying for; like "national security" or "freedom" or "freeing oppressed people".

My long-term dreams and aspirations for humanity are that we will eventually embrace the idea of distributing the planet's energy and resources in more equitable ways and that will help eliminate one of the major causes of war. Americans are 4.5% of the

Memorial Day

(Continued)

world's population but consume approximately 25% of the planet's energy and resources. As the saying goes "What's wrong with this picture?" I am very committed, on a personal level, to limiting my consumption; to continually asking myself "What kind of lifestyle reflects a "fair share of the pie?" I therefore try to incorporate the idea of reducing consumption into my holiday rituals.

Intolerance of religious and/or cultural differences has also been the cause of many wars through the centuries. We've come a long way in this country since the witch burnings and slaughter of Native Americans of our early history. Currently in the United States there is a tremendous amount of acceptance regarding religious, cultural, and lifestyle diversity.

However, we have been involved in wars in the Middle East for decades. I have tried to educate myself about the causes of the seemingly endless conflict in the Middle East, and our involvement in it. It is very, very complex, and I do not have the political knowledge base to declare myself any kind of an expert on it. However, I believe I approach the subject with a lot less bias than most people. I want to address our military involvement in the Middle East here briefly because the background information will help explain why I am proposing an alternative holiday to Memorial Day.

After World War II, we had tremendous sympathy for the Jewish people, due to the horrendous suffering they endured from the Nazi's, and we were therefore supportive of the idea of the establishment of a Jewish homeland. However, we also had our own selfish motives as a country for supporting the

Memorial Day (Continued)

creation of the State of Israel: To protect our interests in Middle East oil. Since World War II, , we have continued to give a huge amount of military and economic support to Israel. I firmly believe that, because we are so dependent for our survival on Middle East Oil, we oftentimes support Israel's numerous encroachments on to Palestinian land, and other political injustices against Palistinians, when we know it is not morally correct.

Protecting our oil interests does not sound like a very noble reason for war. So.... instead we couch our involvement in the Middle East as a "War on Terrorism." I have been opposed to the word "terrorist" for decades, and refrain from using it. It is a word invented to make Middle Eastern guerilla soldiers look like mentally ill people engaged in senseless acts of violence. The reality is organizations like Al- Qaida and Al-Jihad openly declared themselves to be at war with the United States decades ago because of our military presence in Saudi Arabia and Israel. They are engaging in war the only way it is possible to wage war with the United States. The United States is very, very lucky to have geographic borders that are almost impenetrable, which is why no wars have been fought on our soil for centuries. Add to that our military strength and technology, and it is basically impossible to engage in war against the Untied States by traditional methods. Therefore organizations like Al-Qaida and Al-Jihad, and now, ISIS are engaging in war against us the only way possible. Their actions, including the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York in 2001, resulted in the tragic killing of civilians, but they are not senseless; no more senseless

Memorial Day (Continued)

than thousands of other acts of war.

The bombing of the World Trade Center is a manifestation of the belief that it is acceptable to kill to bring about political change. The American media depicts young Arab men training to be suicide "terrorists" as some sick, bizarre concept; I don't think there is much of a line between this and our American youth being trained to be Green Berets or Marines. All countries indoctrinate their youth to be willing to die for their country in battle, and bestow great honor upon them for their willingness to do so. Is there some significant difference because there is a 100% chance that the soldier will die?

The 9/11/01 bombing of the World Trade Center is no isolated incident of targeting innocent civilians. There was napalm in Vietnam and the atomic bomb dropping in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and countless other examples in every war in history. I do acknowledge that there are levels of war atrocities, which is why the Geneva Convention was drafted and adopted. However, the **first step** down the path of war atrocities is the belief that it is okay to kill to resolve conflicts over resources or religious / cultural differences.

It is true of course that the Islamic groups engage in torture and practices that we consider barbaric, i.e. public beheading. They are barbaric, however, we have drawn the lines of what is acceptable practices of war from a position of being the most powerful military power in the world. We do not need to engage in these types of practices to conduct or win our wars, but they may need to. And, in reality, we engaged in some

Memorial Day (Continued)

hideous torture practices in Gautama Bay. And some pretty hideous police brutality happens in our own cities. We also purposely knocked out power in Bagdad in the first Gulf War leaving millions without electricity or running water/sewage, which created a lot of suffering for civilians. So.... I would apply a "He who has not sinned, cast the first stone" philosophy here and say: War is atrocious and brutal, and the human race needs to evolve away from the fundamental belief that it is acceptable to use violence to resolve conflicts.

I have no magic answer as to how to eliminate war. I certainly do not have any delusion that if we were to suddenly dismantle the American military, peace would instantly prevail. I think that world peace can only come about through a slow evolution of consciousness; which brings us back to the subject of this book: redesigning rituals. I believe that part of the way I can do something on a personal level to help move humanity a little closer to world peace is to stop glorifying war. Choosing to stop participating in holidays that subtly endorse war is a way of creating "world peace consciousness."

I have come to believe that the grieving that is done on Memorial Day for all the American soldiers who lost their lives in wars throughout the centuries, is, in subtle ways, glorifying war. I believe that grieving for American soldiers is missing the mark. We need to broaden our focus to grieve for all of the soldiers' lives lost, on all sides, in all wars. Furthermore, I think it is imperative that, while grieving for all the soldiers' lives lost, we challenge the morality of war itself.

Memorial Day (Continued)

"An alternative Memorial Day celebration will recall not only the tragedy of lives lost, but will also confess the futility of war itself as a means to resolve conflict."

*Milo Thornberry (1982) The Alternative Celebrations Catalog.
New York, NY: The Pilgrim Press, p. 66.*

I have thus created World Peace Day as an alternative to Memorial Day. Here are some idea of how to celebrate it:

Alternative Holiday: World Peace Day

There are many organizations which define various days as peace holidays. However, I chose to celebrate my peace day in May, in place of Memorial Day, because it fits with my goal of slowly eliminating holidays that I believe are ill-suited to the needs of today, by transforming them into new holidays. I define World Peace Day as a time to try to further develop a consciousness of peace, and a day to devote time and energy to making some small personal contribution toward a more peaceful world. World peace must start within each person, as Marilyn Ferguson put so beautifully:

. . .Peace is a state of mind, not a state of the nation. Without personal transformation, the people of the world will be forever locked in conflict.

If we limit ourselves to the old-paradigm concept of averting war, we are trying to

World Peace Day

(Continued)

overpower darkness, rather than switching on the light. If we reframe the problem – if we think of fostering community, health, innovation, self-discovery, purpose -- we are already engaged in waging peace. In a rich, creative, meaningful environment, there is no room for hostility.

War is unthinkable in a society of autonomous people, who have discovered the connectedness of all humanity, who are unafraid of alien ideas and alien cultures, who know that all revolutions begin within, and that you cannot impose your brand of enlightenment on anyone else.

. . . We need not wait for leadership. We can begin to effect change at any point in a complex system: a human life, a family, a nation. One person can create a transformative environment for others through trust and friendship. A warm family, or community, can make a stranger feel at ease. A society can encourage growth and renewal in its members.

We can begin anywhere -- everywhere. "Let there be peace," says a bumper sticker, "and let it begin with me." Let there be health, learning, relationship, right uses of power, meaningful work. Let there be transformation, and let it begin with me.

Marilyn Ferguson, The Aquarian Conspiracy. Copyright (1980) by Marilyn Ferguson. Reprinted by permission of the publisher, Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., Los Angeles, CA, pp. 411-412.

World Peace Day

(Continued)

If the idea of World Peace Day sounds appealing to you, I offer the following suggestions as possible ways to observe the holiday:

1) Organize a peace rally in your community. Arrange to have guest speakers.

2) Organize a peace parade. Get children involved. Young people are amazingly receptive to the idea of political activism, and will come up with many creative ideas.

3) Organize a moment of silence through a local radio or public access television station, to grieve for the loss of soldiers' lives, on all sides, in all wars. Follow the moment of silence with poetry, or a reading with an anti-war message.

4) Organize a community sing-a-long; belting out anti-war, pro-peace songs with a group of inspired people creates an amazing group energy that is very uplifting. Perhaps follow it by a potluck picnic where people can network.

5) Arrange an interfaith religious service on the topic of world peace. Bringing people of different religious faiths together for a common purpose helps them focus on the universal spiritual principles they all share, rather than their differences and disagreements, thereby increasing religious tolerance.

World Peace Day

(Continued)

The following are some more personal methods of working toward world peace:

1) Read an inspirational book that helps you reaffirm the possibility of world peace and presents ideas about what individuals can do to help create a peaceful world.

2) One exercise that I tried, and found extremely helpful, was not allowing myself to use any violent language for a week. For example, no "He's such an asshole," no "I hate. . .", etc. If you try this exercise, you may discover, as I did, that you carry quite a lot of negative energy within you. believing in peace, and living a life of peace are totally different things, I discovered!

3) Another experience I found helpful is to invite a group of friends over to engage in some conflict resolution games i.e. "Who do you throw off the sinking life raft?" (You could also do this within your own family.) Books are available which contain many Values Dilemma exercises. Then, as a group, using consensus decision-making, you have to come to a decision about what to do in the simulated situations. These types of exercises are extremely helpful in developing the skills necessary for world peace: acceptance of others' values, consideration of others' needs, the ability to be flexible and compromise, creativity, and so on.

4) Another idea for World Peace Day is to make peace with anyone with whom you have a conflict. Allow yourself to let go of

World Peace Day (Continued)

the pent-up hostility that you feel toward that person. Let yourself see the God-energy that lies within that individual, despite whatever characteristics he/she may have that you do not like. You may not ever be able to like this person, but can you learn to accept him/her?

5) Another important exercise is to examine your own energy and resource consumption and set goals to reduce your level of consumption. As I mentioned earlier, the real underlying cause of many wars is greed over resources. As Americans we consume way more than our share of the planet's energy and resources and this contributes to global unrest. World Peace Day is an excellent time to set goals to reduce over indulgent spending, and reroute those dollars to an organization which helps promote world peace.

There are endless possibilities for celebrating a "world peace" holiday. If you have a problem with replacing a fun oriented holiday with these serious kinds of activities, you can resolve this dilemma in several ways. One way is to have your alternative holiday observances a few days before the actual day. The other possibility is to do the consciousness raising activities on the actual holiday, and schedule a fun day off for yourself the following weekend.

JUNE

Summer Solstice

Summer Solstice

As I mentioned earlier, many people have begun celebrating the cycles of the earth. My friends and I celebrate the solstices and equinoxes by coming together for a potluck dinner. We read poems together and sing songs. I have included a poem that I wrote, and read, at one of our summer solstice celebrations. I think it captures the essence of the holiday.

Summer Solstice Poem

*We come together today to give thanks
for this beautiful planet that ever provides
its bounty for our sustenance.*

*The rigorous spring planting is over.
We have witnessed the seeds reawaken,
As the earth pours forth its endless
strength and vitality.*

*We joyously behold the wondrous
splendor of summer.*

*Today we renew our appreciation and
wonder for the Divine balance and harmony
of the earth,*

*And reaffirm our commitment to live
in reverence of nature.*

*As we watch the earth so jubilantly
and lovingly nurture our crops, may we
also be inspired to give from our hearts.*

*As we watch the earth pour forth its
gifts to us,*

May we feel called upon to give of

Summer Solstice (Continued)

ourselves more fully in whatever work we are engaged.

As we witness the harmonious cycles of the earth, may our faith in a loving universe be renewed.

Another excellent idea for a Summer Solstice community celebration is a New Games tournament in a park. Refer to the section on New Year's parties for a discussion of New Games.

As I mentioned earlier, the equinoxes or solstices are also a great time to make some "earth-friendly" goals. Express your love of the earth by setting up goals such as these:

1) Give up using toxic cleaners in your house, and replace them with ecologically sound products.

2) Help start a recycling program in your city if there isn't one.

3) Buy secondhand clothing.

4) Form a Nature Preservation Group. Have your group engage in fundraising activities to raise capital to purchase a small parcel of land in your city. Then donate the land to the city for use as a Nature Preserve or park. This will permanently protect the land from urban development. It's amazing how nature areas within cities can increase the quality of life for urban residents.

JULY

Fourth of July Independence Day

Fourth of July Independence Day

Fourth of July/Independence Day
When I was a kid, Fourth of July just meant lots of fun; swimming at my grandparent's lake cottage, parades, sparklers and fireworks. I had a vague sense that there was some meaning behind it all, but I didn't give it much thought. It really wasn't until I studied history and political science at college that I began to do some rethinking about the political holidays of our culture.

As I became a more politically aware person, I began to believe that to solve the multitude of problems facing this planet, we need to cultivate a "global consciousness" or "planetary citizen" perspective. I thus became more and more uncomfortable with national patriotism, and less willing to participate in patriotic holidays. In the case of Independence Day, I came to believe that celebrating our freedom from colonization from England is too narrow a focus for the basis of a holiday. I was interested in designing a holiday that would have the broader focus of developing freedom from oppression, and exploitation, for all peoples of the world. I was interested in helping to extend the rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" beyond the boundaries of my own country. I'd like to discuss this idea of "freeing people from oppression" real briefly.

Though the United States likes to portray itself as the great international protector and

Fourth of July (Continued)

defender of freedom, I have come to the sad realization that this is sometimes a distortion and rationalization. The truth is our foreign aid and military assistance is very selective. We tend to intervene when we have a vested interest in the particular country; i.e. Israel gives us a foothold in the Middle East to protect our oil interests. We also tend to intervene in countries that produce crucial exports. We often ignore oppression and dictatorships in countries we have no interest in and, in fact, we have been known to support dictatorships when it benefits us. I conclude that the United States protects its own economic interests abroad a lot more often than it actually protects freedom. I think the best way the United States government can truly help foster freedom in countries with oppressive governments is through our participation in the United Nations. The United Nations, by its nature, is protected from the self interest of individual nations and can therefore truly serve as an international protector of human freedom and equality. If the United States really wants to help alleviate oppression, we need to abdicate the responsibility of protecting freedom to the United Nations and be respectful of its decisions.

To return to the subject of American Independence Day, I decided to create an alternative holiday which has a global rather than national focus. I coined the holiday Equality Day. I actually celebrate it in February on President's Day as July is not a good month to try and focus on a political holiday. I therefore just use the 4th of July as a summer holiday to enjoy getting together with family and sunshine and have my

AUGUST

Harvest Celebration Day

political holiday in February in the doldrums of winter.

AUGUST

Harvest Celebration Day

The original Thanksgiving that was held in the days of the Pilgrims in the 1600's was focused on giving thanks for the harvest. However, when Thanksgiving actually became a holiday, more than two hundred years later, in 1863, it was set to happen in November, and the connection to the harvest was no longer the focus of the holiday. I think it would make more sense to have had Thanksgiving remain a harvest based day of thanks giving. However, I obviously do not have the power to change our national holiday designations and get paid days off from work or days off from school for kids. So I decided to just design an additional holiday for myself that I designate as a time of thankfulness for the harvest. I celebrate it in August at the peak of the harvest in the state I live in, Michigan.

I get together with friends and we have a potluck dinner where we use locally produced foods to make our dishes (plus a few other ingredients as necessary). We bring poems or inspirational readings about giving thanks for the harvest. I have included a couple of my favorite recipes and my favorite poem about giving thanks for food. You might want to consider incorporating a harvest festival into your life. I have found it very rewarding.

Harvest Celebration Day (Continued)

Excerpt from "The Prophet" by Lebanese poet Kahlil Gibran

*Then an old man, a keeper of an inn, said,
Speak to us of Eating and Drinking.*

And he said:

*Would that you could live on the fragrance of
the earth, and like an air plant, be sustained by
light.*

*But since you must kill to eat, and rob the
newly born of its mother's milk to quench your
thirst,*

Let it then be a act of worship.

And let your board stand an altar

*On which the pure and innocent of forest and
plain are sacrificed for that which is purer and
more innocent in man.*

*When you kill a beast say to him in your
heart,*

*"By the same power that slays you, I too am
slain; and too shall be consumed.*

*For the law that delivered you into my hand
Shall deliver me into a mightier hand.*

*Your blood and my blood is naught but the
sap that feeds the tree of heaven."*

*And when you crush an apple with your teeth,
Say to it in your heart,*

"Your seeds shall live in my body,

*And the buds of your tomorrow shall blossom
in my heart.*

*And your fragrance shall be my breath,
And together we shall rejoice through the
seasons."*

**Excerpt from
"The Prophet"
By Kahlil Gibran
(Continued)**

*And in the autumn, when you gather the grapes
of your vineyards*

for the winepress, say in your heart,

*"I too am a vineyard, and my fruit shall be
gathered for the winepress,*

*And like new wine I shall be kept in eternal
vessels."*

*And in winter, when you draw the wine, let
there be in your heart*

a song for each cup;

*And let there be in the song a remembrance
for the autumn days,*

and for the vineyard, and for the winepress.

*Reprinted from THE PROPHET, by Kahlil Gibran, by
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C.T.A. of the Kahlil Gibran estate and Mary G. Gibran,
pp. 23-24.*

Please find below pages a few of my favorite recipes to use for a Harvest Festival Pot-luck dinner.

Harvest Festival Recipes

Harvest Hoagies

By Mike Burns

(Serves 4)

Ingredients:

4 hoagie buns	1 large yellow onion
1 red bell pepper	2 large cloves garlic
1 orange bell pepper	3 tablespoons olive oil
1 green bell pepper	tamari
1 large bunch fresh basil leaves	
1 pound mozzarella cheese	

Directions:

Cut the peppers into slices about the size of a baby finger.

Slice the onion about the size of a finger.

Mince the garlic

Remove stems from basil leaves.

Grate the cheese.

Place the olive oil in a large skillet on a med-high flame. Get oil hot.

Add the peppers, onions, and garlic. Sprinkle lightly with tamari.

Cook until just tender.

Open the Hoagie bus and toast them lightly in the oven.

Remove the buns.

Place a layer of basil on the buns, then a layer of veggies.

Top with cheese.

Place back in oven for a few minutes until the cheese melts.

Tomato and Cuke Marinade

(Serves 8)

By Mike Burns

Ingredients:

6 medium size perfectly ripe tomatoes	1/4 cup fresh parsley
2 medium cucumbers	1 small red onion
2 medium cucumbers	

Dressing:

1 tablespoon honey	1 1/2 teaspoon onion powder
1 1/2 teaspoon granulated garlic	1/2 cup balsamic vinegar
1 1/2 teaspoon white pepper	1/4 teaspoon thyme
1/2 teaspoon dried basil	1 teaspoon oregano
1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper	1/8 cup water
1/2 cup good quality olive oil	
juice from 1/2 fresh lemon	
teaspoon dry, yellow mustard	

Directions

Make the dressing first by whisking together all ingredients in a bowl. Cut tomatoes into large wedges, and then cut the wedges in half. Add to large mixing bowl. Cut the cucumbers into thick slices then into quarters. Add to bowl. Cut the red onion into small slices. Add to bowl. Remove stems from the parsley and mince. Add to bowl. ONLY ADD ABOUT 1/2 OF THE DRESSING TO THE VEGGIES. Use the rest for a great salad dressing! Serve immediately.

Stuffed Zucchini

(Serves 4)

Ingredients:

4 medium small zucchini
1 med yellow onion
2 cloves garlic
1/3 cup dry bread crumbs

3/4 cup crumbled feta cheese
salt & pepper
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 eggs

Directions

Cut the zucchini in half lengthwise.
Scoop out 90% of the insides of the zucchini. Place in mixing bowl.
Mince the onion and the garlic.
Warm the olive oil in a frying pan.

Sauté the onion, garlic and zucchini insides for about five minutes.
Add salt and pepper.
In a bowl beat the eggs.
Add the cooked zucchini mixture to the beaten eggs.

Stuff the zucchini mixture into the hollowed out zucchini.
Combine the feta cheese and the bread crumbs.
Place on top the zucchini.
Bake at 375 for twenty-five minutes.

Fancy Schmancy Corn on the Cob

Serves 4: 1 ½ ear per person)

Ingredients:

6 ears of freshly picked sweet corn
1 cup fresh grated parmesan cheese
2/3 cups Progresso brand seasoned bread crumbs
1 stick butter, melted

Directions:

Remove husks from corn.
Place the breadcrumbs and the grated cheese on a large plate
Mix together.
Steam corn in a large pan in 3 inches of water until just tender.*
Roll each ear in the butter until you have a lot of butter on the ear.
Then roll each ear in the bread crumb/cheese mixture.
Serve immediately.

Note: Boiling corn makes it mushy, steaming gives it a wonderful texture

SEPTEMBER

Labor Day

(This also includes a discussion of May Day)

In order to evaluate whether I wanted to change the way I celebrated Labor Day, I had to do quite a lot of research about the origins of the holiday. Therefore, the background information I have included about Labor Day is somewhat lengthy. However, I felt that in order for readers to evaluate whether they wanted to redesign their Labor Day celebrations, it was necessary to present them with an adequate history of the political origins of the holiday. I gathered this historical information about Labor Day from the work of Philip Foner, renowned author of many excellent books on the history of the American Labor movement.

The first time a day was designated as a labor holiday was in the early 1800's. The Central Labor Union of New York passed a resolution in 1882 that the fifth of September be "proclaimed a general holiday for workingmen and proposed that parades and other festivities take place." The Central Labor Union also urged other unions throughout the country to celebrate September 5th as a universal holiday for workingmen.

In 1884, the Federation of Organized Trade and Labor Unions of the U.S. and Canada (soon to become the American Federation of Labor) carried the Central Labor Union's idea of a labor day a step further. They made the following resolution:

"Resolved, that the first Monday in September of each year be set aside

Labor Day (Continued)

as Laborers' national holiday, and that have recommend its observance by all wage earners irrespective of sex, calling, or nationality."

Convention Proceedings, Federation of Organized Trades, 1884, p. 23, cited in Phillip Foner (1955) History of the Labor Movement in the United States, New York, NY: International Publishers, p. 97.

The concept of Labor Day was enthusiastically received throughout the country. There were massive parades, speeches, political rallies, and marches in cities across the nation. During the same years that the first Monday of September was initiated as a holiday to honor laborers, American labor unions were unwittingly planting the seeds for a labor holiday whose scope and significance would surpass the labor day celebrated the first Monday of September: May Day.

In 1884, the Federation of Organized Trade and Labor Unions of the U.S. and Canada, which had been active in establishing Labor Day as a holiday, began massive organizing for the eight-hour day for all U.S. workers. They passed the following resolution:

...Resolved that eight hours shall constitute a legal day's labor from and after May 1, 1886, and that we recommend to labor organizations throughout this district that they so

Labor Day (Continued)

direct their laws as to conform to this resolution by the time named."

Proceedings, Federation of Trade and Labor Unions, 1884, pp. 10-14, 24-25, cited in Phillip Foner (1986) May Day; A Short History 1886--1986, New York, NY: International Publishers.

On May 1, 1886, there were massive strikes and work stoppages in cities throughout the United States. Estimates of the number of strikers ran as high as half a million. The entire city of Chicago was brought to a standstill.

Unfortunately, the worker strikes for the eight-hour day on May 1, 1886 were followed by a tragedy. During a rally at Haymarket Square in Chicago, to protest the police brutality that had been used against the striking workers, a bomb exploded in the crowd, killing one policeman and wounding seventy.

Eight anarchist/socialists, militant organizers for the eight-hour day strikes, were selected to stand trial as a result of the Haymarket bomb incident. Only one of these eight men was present at Haymarket Square, and he was speaking at the time of the incident and not in a position to have thrown the bomb. However, the eight were indicted for murder of the policeman killed at Haymarket. They were not indicted for throwing the bomb, but were accused of the murder on the grounds that their past speeches and "propaganda" had influenced the anonymous person who threw the bomb!

The eight were collectively charged and convicted of conspiracy to commit murder.

Labor Day (Continued)

The case received international attention. Letters poured in from all over the world asking that the eight men not be executed. The indictment of these men was seen the world over as a tragic injustice. It was obvious they were being persecuted because of their political views and because of their work in organizing workers. The state attorney general's summation speech to the jury openly admitted as much:

Law is on trial. Anarchy is on trial. These men have been selected, picked out by the grand jury, and indicted because they were leaders. They are no more guilty than thousands who follow them. Gentlemen of the jury; convict these men, make examples of them, hang them and save our institutions, our society.

Henry David, 1936, The History of the Haymarket Affair, New York, NY, pp. 234-54, 297-300, cited in Foner, May Day.

Three of the eight accused were hung, one committed suicide or was murdered in his cell, and the others were sentenced to life imprisonment. Spurred by the success of the May 1st workers' strikes, and fueled by the unjust hanging of the men who are known today as the Haymarket Martyrs, May 1st soon developed into a labor holiday. In December of 1888, the American Federation of Labor (A.F.L.) proclaimed that May 1, 1890, was the day that organized labor would enforce the eight-hour day, via a mass

Labor Day (Continued)

strike if necessary. In 1889, the Second Socialist International (an international congress of Socialist delegates from various countries), in support of the A.F.L.'s plan to rally for the eight-hour day, passed the following resolution:

A great international demonstration shall be organized for a fixed date in such a manner that the workers in all countries and in all cities shall on a specified day simultaneously address to the public authorities a demand to fix the workday at eight hours and to put into effect the other resolutions of the International Congress of Paris.

In view of the fact that such a demonstration has already been resolved upon by the American Federation of Labor at its convention of December 1888 in St. Louis, for May 1, 1890, that day is accepted as the day for international demonstration.

The workers of the various nations shall organize the demonstration in a manner suited to the conditions in their country.

On May 1, 1890, there were work stoppages and demonstrations throughout the world, and May Day--International Workers Day--was born:

The workers allowed nothing to hinder them from celebrating the 1st of May--not outbursts of fury from the entire bourgeois press of all countries, nor the decrees of governments, nor the threats of dismissal, nor huge

Labor Day (Continued)

military levels. They celebrated everywhere; such an international celebration as the world has not yet experienced; the whole civilized world was one great May-field where millions and millions of proletarians assembled in order to draw together the demands they find essential for the further development of society.

Herbert Steiner, "The First May Day in Austria." Paper delivered at conference on the First May Day Throughout the World, Second Congress of the World Association of Institutes for the Study of the History of the Labor Movement, Mexico, 1980, pp. 1-2, cited in Foner, May Day.

American labor unions enthusiastically participated in May Day for several years. However, in the early 1900's, the large American labor unions began undergoing a conservative swing. Up until 1900, American labor unions had many socialist members and sympathies; many of the constitutions and platforms of the early unions were socialist in orientation. However, by 1900, the large American unions were becoming anti-socialist and anti-Communist. Socialists began forming unions of their own like The Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), which professed more radical philosophies. As the rift widened between the large American unions and the Socialists, the unions disowned May Day as a holiday because they felt it was too linked to socialism:

The struggle against Socialists inside the A.F.L. made the radical and inter-national

Labor Day (Continued)

aspects of May Day seem a liability to conservative unionists. Soon the leadership of the A.F.L. disowned May Day as a workers' holiday, claiming that it belonged to Europe and the Socialists rather than to the United States and U.S. trade unions. They ceased to mention the origin of May Day in the United States and threw all of their support behind Labor Day. To be sure, individual unions affiliated with the A.F.L., especially those with Socialist leadership and membership, continued to participate in May Day parades and meetings. But by 1905, the A.F.L. made no references in its official publications to the Federation's role in founding May Day as a day of labor demonstration, or to the fact that May Day had originated in the United States. So far as the A.F.L. was officially concerned only Labor Day was a day to be celebrated by workers in the United States.

Foner, May Day pp. 76-77.

Despite the fact that the A. F. L. disowned May Day as a holiday, May Day continued to be celebrated in this country, though it was never to attain the scope and popularity that it received in the first ten years of its existence. During the McCarthy era in the 1950's, there were attempts to repress May Day parades and demonstrations in this country. Permits for parades were repeatedly denied, and organizers of May Day activities were harassed for their anti-government, pro-Communist beliefs. However, demonstrations were still held with marchers carrying banners such as "Freedom to the Rosenbergs", and "Resistance to McCarthyism."

Labor Day (Continued)

Attempts were also made in the 1950's to eradicate May Day observances in this country by designating other holidays on May 1st. In 1955, May 1st was proclaimed by President Eisenhower to be Loyalty Day. Following the inception of Loyalty Day, Loyalty Day groups were given permits to hold parades, though May Day organizers were denied parade permits. In 1961, May 1st was proclaimed by President Kennedy to be Law Day. The organizers of these holidays, e.g., the Veterans of Foreign Wars, openly proclaimed that they were deliberately designing holidays on May 1st to discourage the observation of "communist" May Day.

Despite efforts by conservative groups to eradicate the celebration of May Day in the United States, liberal and radical groups continued to observe May Day. Though the observance of May Day declined in the United States during the decades from 1910-1980, the converse was true in other countries. Millions of workers from all corners of the globe rallied behind the revolutionary idea of a holiday that promoted solidarity among workers in all countries. May Day demonstrations and observances occurred in diverse countries such as Russia, England, Germany, Mexico, Costa Rica, Canada, Ireland, China, Cuba, France, Spain, Italy, Japan, Poland, South Africa, Vietnam, and Turkey.

The year 1986 marked the hundredth-year anniversary of May Day, and various political groups made a concerted effort to encourage American workers to join the rest of the world in observing May Day as an international workers' holiday:

Labor Day (Continued)

May Day, born in the U.S.A. thirty-one years before the October Revolution in the U.S.S.R., is presented as though it had been secretly hatched in the Kremlin. It is portrayed as something alien to the struggles of the working class that gave it its birth. Surely it is time, and past time, for the working people of our country to reclaim their significant May Day heritage. Let May 1, 1986, mark the rebirth of the observance of May Day in cities across our country--across the land, whose labor movement created this mighty holiday and gave it to the workers of the world.

Labor Today, May, 1985, cited in Foner, May Day, p. 159.

Labor Day, that is, the first Monday in September, evolved along very different lines than did May Day. Labor Day initially had a militant political orientation, similar to May Day, as the following Labor Day resolution of the Minneapolis Trades and Labor Assembly of 1884 reflected:

To capitalists, bankers and their hirelings, the power you possess when you thoroughly understand how to think and legislate for yourselves. While you drudge and toil away your lives for a bare existence, these idlers and non-producers live in luxury and debauchery, squandering with a lavish hand that which belongs to you--that which your labor produces.

Labor Day

(Continued)

... They have tried to deny us the right to organize--a right guaranteed by the constitution of this government. Therefore we call on you to show that we defy them; that you will organize; that you have organized; that the day of your deliverance is approaching. To do this we ask you to join in our ranks in celebrating this day.

The Trades and Labor Assembly proclaims to be labor's annual holiday the first Monday of September. Leave your benches, leave your shops....

St. Paul Globe Democrat, July 19, August 16, 1885, cited in Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Volume 2, p. 97.

During the first decades of Labor Day observances, there were Labor Day parades as well as speeches and rallies aimed at improving the working conditions and wages of laborers. However, as the plight of the majority of workers in this country improved, and the unions won more and more rights and benefits for their workers, Labor Day celebrations in the United States lost much of their political and social activist orientation. Through the years, the holiday took on a more recreational focus. Additional activities such as fireworks, barbecues, state and county fairs, beauty pageants, community games, square dances, and concerts, among other activities, were added to Labor Day celebrations. Eventually Labor Day celebrations became family oriented instead of community oriented. The most common way that evolved for celebrating Labor Day

Labor Day (Continued)

was for families to escape to the state parks for a last picnic or camping trip of the summer season. This is the way most Americans still observe Labor Day in the United States today. After researching the origins of Labor Day I began the task of evaluating the ways I celebrated the holiday, and considering whether I wanted to make any changes in the way I observed Labor Day.

Having grown up in a generation that was too late to witness the active years of the labor movement in this country, I had never participated in any Labor Day activities that had any political focus. For me Labor Day had always been a recreational holiday for swimming, camping, and picnicking. I hadn't known much about the history of May Day until I began research for this chapter.

After researching the political history of Labor Day, I became uncomfortable about the fact that the day had been transformed into a purely recreational holiday. I realized that my generation has come to take for granted the many rights and benefits that workers through the decades painfully struggled to achieve: minimum wage guarantees, child protection laws, safe working conditions, paid vacation and holidays, pensions, health insurance, and, most importantly, the right of workers to organize, strike, boycott, picket, and collectively bargain to improve their wages and working conditions. We have lost touch with the memories of how workers in this country worked fifteen-hour days for pitiful wages and were persecuted and jailed for trying to improve their condition through organizing. It seemed to me that observing this holiday with nothing other than picnics and barbecues is a great dishonor to the

Labor Day (Continued)

countless workers who, through the centuries, painfully struggled to overcome their exploitation.

I also began to see that letting Labor Day become a recreational holiday, because the majority of workers in the United States have attained a comfortable middle-class existence, is a tragic oversight of the many millions of workers who are still exploited. There are still many oppressed laborers in this country: migrant farm workers, coal and copper miners, women, Blacks, those with minimum wage jobs, and the unemployed, to name a few. I began to realize that when we--as workers who are lucky enough to now have decent wages and rights as workers--ignore the plight of workers who are still exploited, we are violating the basic principle on which the labor movement of this country was founded--that laborers must unite in solidarity to work against their common problems until all workers have been rescued from exploitation.

I also became uncomfortable with the fact that May Day has been disavowed as a holiday in the United States. Because we, in America, do not participate in International Workers Day, we are cut off from the struggles of workers in other parts of the world. This is particularly sad, because it is quite often American capitalists who are exploiting Third World workers! In many Third World countries, U.S. agribusiness conglomerates force indigent peoples off their lands, and force them to become laborers on cash crop plantations. The wages and working conditions on these plantations are some of the worst in the world. On a similar note, American capitalists often move their

Labor Day (Continued)

industries overseas (where workers do not have strong labor unions to defend their rights), to avoid paying union wages and benefits to American workers.

In summary, after studying the history of Labor Day, I concluded that it was time for me, as an American worker with decent wages and benefits, to participate, in some way, in helping less fortunate workers throughout the world to escape from their oppression. The first step towards political change is raising one's awareness/information base. Therefore part of my Labor Day observation is reading books or articles about labor issues around the world. If you are interested in educating yourself about current labor issues as part of your Labor Day Observation here is a list of books and websites about labor issues worldwide:

BOOKS

Labor Movements; Global Perspectives-- Stephanie Luce

Fighting for a Livable Wage – Stephanie Luce

The Living Wage – Building a Fair Economy – Robert Pullin
& Stephanie Luce

Child Labor Today –A Human Rights Issue -- Wendy Herumin

Looking Up at the Bottom Line—The Struggle for the Living Wage –
Richard Troxell

There Are No Children Here – Alex Kutlowitz

Nickle and Diming on (Not) Getting By in America
- Barbara Ehrenreich

WEBSITES

Univ of California, Berkley Labor Center –

www.laborcenter.berkeley.edu/living_wage

Political Economy Research Institute -- **www.umass.edu/labor**

Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy -- **www.laane.org**

Yes Magazine -- **www.yesmagazine.org**

Wayne State University Labor Studies Center --

www.clas.wayne.edu/lsc

House the Homeless, Inc. -- **www.universallivingwage.org**

The Child Labor Coalition -- **stopchildlabor.org**

Labor Day (Continued)

If you want to engage in some kind of community celebration of the holiday, here are some ideas:

- 1) Organize a community sing-along. Compile labor struggle songs from folksingers like Holly Near, Ronnie Gilbert, Joan Baez, Arlo Guthrie, Kate Wolf, and Claudia Schmidt. A community sing-along can raise consciousness about labor issues, and create a feeling of solidarity and empowerment among participants.

The following songbooks might be helpful.

Alan Lomax, Woodie Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Hard Hitting Songs for HardHit People; American Folk Songs of the

Labor Day

(Continued)

Depression and the Labor Movement of the 1930's. Oak Publications (1967).

Pete Seeger and Rob Reiser, Carry It On--A History in Song and Picture of The Working Men and Women of America. Simon & Schuster (1985).

Phillip Foner, American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century. University of Illinois Press (1974).

2) An idea that I think holds a lot of promise, is to hold fund-raising events, and donate the money raised to organizations fighting for workers' rights. I think this would be particularly easy to implement, because it would fit right in with the ways people are already used to celebrating Labor Day. For example, you could hold barbecues, square dances, picnics, auctions, concerts, small fairs, i.e. traditional Labor Day activities, and use these recreational activities as a means to generate money for labor causes!

Another change I made after researching this chapter, is I commemorate May Day in some way. I very much hope that in the future, American workers recognize the importance of getting involved in international workers' organizations. I suspect that, as we see more international trade agreements come into being, workers of all countries will find they do indeed share common problems and concerns.

Of course, it's important to think about issues of workers throughout the year; not

Labor Day (Continued)

just on workers' holidays. An important thing people concerned about workers' rights can do on a regular basis is to shop at businesses which treat workers fairly, and pay workers decent wages, even if that sometimes means paying more for your consumer goods. Supporting local or family businesses is a good idea, too. Something I try to do, out of respect for workers, is to not shop on holidays, if at all possible. I think it is pitiful that so many retail workers are forced to work on holidays, so consumers can shop almost 365 days a year! So there's something you can do every day to support workers' rights, along with these ideas for reclaiming Labor Day as a workers' holiday.

Autumn Equinox

As I have discussed previously, I observe the seasonal changes of the earth as holidays. I celebrate by getting together with friends for a potluck dinner, reciting poems and inspirational readings, singing, dancing and playing games. I have included a poem below, which I read at one of our Autumn Equinox celebrations, in which I try to capture the essence of the holiday.

Poem for an Autumn Equinox Pot Luck Dinner with Friends

*Today, we come together to behold and partake of the
Earth's wisdom.*

*In the earth's beautiful balance and harmony we
recognize, is manifest the wisdom of God.*

Today is the first day of autumn.

*We behold the magnificent and breath-taking
colors of the trees.*

*As we witness this awesome transformation,
we are reminded of the cycles through which we all
must pass.*

*We are reminded that only through death
comes re-birth.*

*We watch the individual leaves and plants die,
That the future trees, and forests, and fields,
May be born again next year.*

*We are thus called to understand that, when someday we
as individuals die,*

*It is so our spirits can be re-born into new form,
For further growth and enlightenment.*

*In beholding the earth's transition
into autumn,*

*The earth teaches us, not only of the need for
death,*

*But also of the ongoing necessity in life
of letting go of parts,*

That the whole may maintain its health.

*As we watch the trees and forests
let go of the parts of themselves
that have fulfilled their unique purpose,*

*May we become more in touch
with what we need to let go of in ourselves,
In order to grow and blossom in new ways.*

Autumn Equinox

(Continued)

*May we reaffirm our understanding that
culmination and moving on
Are necessary for future growth and re-birth.
May we remember all that the earth teaches us today
in the coming months.*

*May we remember to view all pain
as a catalyst for growth.
May we remain in touch with the knowledge
That each of us has a unique purpose
In the ever-changing, ever-evolving
Universe.*

*Let us feast and dance together to rejoice in the divine
balance and harmony of our planet,
And the Universe.*

You may want to consider celebrating the seasonal changes of the earth as holidays. I have found it a positive experience. As I discussed previously, I like to use these earth centered holidays to make lifestyle goals which help me to live more in harmony with the earth. Some examples you might consider are:

1) Begin packing your own lunches in reusable containers, instead of ordering lunch out in those horrible Styrofoam containers.

2) Reduce the amount of money you spend on clothes.

Autumn Equinox (Continued)

3) *Drink water, instead of soft drinks in aluminum cans. Even if the cans are recyclable, drinking water from the faucet in your own cup is even less consumptive.*

4) *Donate \$20.00 a month to an environmental organization.*

For more simple lifestyle ideas consider purchasing *The Simple Lifestyle Calendar* put out by The Appalachia Science in the Public Interest. Contact them at:

50 Lair Street,

Mt. Vernon, KY 40456.

Phone: (606) 256-0077

Website: www.appalachia-spi.org.

*Also available on Amazon.com

OCTOBER Columbus Day

Like most children in the United States, I was taught that Columbus was a great hero. I memorized the names of his ships in school, and learned poems like this one.

*"In fourteen-hundred ninety-two,
Columbus sailed the ocean blue."*

However, in later years, as my reading branched beyond sugar-coated school history books, my opinion of "heroes", like Columbus, changed drastically. After reading books like Howard Zinn's *A Peoples' History of the United States*, (Harper & Row, 1980) , I

Columbus Day

(Continued)

looked at Columbus as far less than a hero. I was further prompted to re-examine my view of Columbus when a Black friend of mine (sympathetic to racism), remarked to me, "How in the hell can you discover a country that's already inhabited? What Columbus discovered was how to screw Native Americans to make a lot of money." As I became aware of the atrocities perpetrated by Columbus upon Native Americans, I did not like the thought of my children being taught to celebrate his birthday. I don't mean to make Columbus out to be more of an evil villain than many other people in that era of history. However, we don't celebrate their birthdays!

After hundreds of years of oppression and disrespect, Native Americans are finally coming to be appreciated as a people with a rich, spiritual, and highly democratic culture with a wonderful reverence for the earth. It is very sad to read about the corruption and ruthlessness of Columbus, the early settlers, and the United States government in dealing with Native peoples in centuries past. And of course life on Native American reservations is still not very high quality.

I hope that I will live to see Columbus Day removed from our calendar of holidays. In the meantime, I can at least eliminate it from my own life by no longer acknowledging it. If my future kids go to public schools, and the teachers teach the same old "Columbus the great discoverer of America, who helped the Indians evolve from their savage existence crap", I'll make sure to do some rabble rousing about that!

Columbus Day (Continued)

Alternative Holiday: Equality Day

I presume that the reason Columbus Day was celebrated was that he stood for freedom from colonization and non-representative government. I believe this need is covered by Equality Day. (See listing under February)

Halloween

Halloween can be traced to Druidic origins. According to the Celtic calendar, November 1st was the beginning of the new year. Thus, Halloween was originally a new year's celebration. Many aspects of the custom, therefore, relate to transition into the new year. The name of the holiday was originally

Samhain, meaning summer's end. Many of the ceremonies pertaining to Samhain had to do with preparations for the approaching winter. The grain was gathered, animals were returned to their stalls, and the sun god was thanked for the harvest. Since food supplies were abundant, a giant feast was held. It was also common to end the old year, and prepare for the new by extinguishing all the hearth fires, and starting new ones. The village religious leader would start a new sacred fire, and all the villagers would re-light their home hearth fires from the sacred fire.

It was also a common belief in ancient religions that the spirits of the dead came to visit the living during the changing of the year.

The Pagan idea used to be that the crucial joints between the seasons

Halloween

(Continued)

opened cracks in the fabric of space/time allowing contact between the ghost world and the mortal one.

Barbara Walker(1983) The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets. New York, NY: Harper & Row, p. 372.

Thus, Samhain abounded with ideas of spirits, ghosts, and the like. Sometimes, these visiting spirits were viewed as friendly. Many believed that deceased relatives came to visit on this one night of the year. It was a common custom to leave apples and nuts out for the returning spirits. Fires were lit to lead the spirits back to their ancestral homes. However, some viewed the visiting spirits of the deceased as unfriendly and vengeful.

Perhaps how one viewed the visiting spirits had much to do with what kind of terms one was on with one's deceased relatives! It is believed that the custom of Halloween pranks was related to the belief in visiting spirits. One's pranks could be blamed on the visiting spirits.

The Celts also believed that Samhain was the time when the Lord of the Dead returned to Earth. Thus to appease him, sacrifices were offered. Animals, usually horses, were burned. However, human criminals were also sometimes burned in wicker cages as an offering to the Lord of the Dead. Animals were also burned on Samhain, because it was believed that human souls were relegated by the Lord of the Dead to live in animals' bodies for twelve months to expiate their sins. Having done their penance over the preceding

Halloween

(Continued)

year, their souls could now be released to Heaven by burning the body of the animal in which they dwelled.

Samhain was also one of the eight major holidays of the religion of Witchcraft. Thus the connection of witches with Halloween. The eight holidays of Witchcraft are called Sabbats and have to do with the cyclical relation of the female goddess to the male horned god. According to the myths of Witchcraft, on the Autumn Equinox, the male god dies, his death symbolizing the death necessary in all of nature in order for there to be continual rejuvenation and rebirth. Samhain is celebrated as the time of year when the male god visits the land of the dead, where he grows young again, and is reborn, through the Goddess, into a new body on the Winter Solstice. The following is a Witchcraft chant, for Samhain.

*...To the living is revealed the Mystery:
that every ending is but a new beginning.
We meet in time out of time, everywhere
and nowhere, here and there, to greet the
Lord of Death, who is Lord of Life, and the
Triple Goddess, who is the circle of re-birth.*

*Starhawk (1979) The Spiral Dance: A
Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the
Great Goddess. New York, NY:
Harper & Row, p. 181.*

As Christianity took root, attempts were made by the Church to extinguish all non-Christian holiday celebrations. One of the strategies used to eradicate Pagan holidays was to make the dates of Christian holidays coincide with the formerly popular pagan celebrations. Thus, in the eighth century,

Halloween

(Continued)

in an attempt to eliminate the celebration of Samhain, Pope Gregory III moved the Christian holiday of All Saints' Day from the spring to November 1st. Through the centuries, All Hallows' Eve slowly replaced the former Samhain.

Many of the current Halloween customs are a result of the Christianization of the holiday Samhain. The practice of "trick or treating" is believed to have originated from peasants going door to door in the villages asking for donations for the community feast held in honor of All Saints' Day. The custom of dressing up in costumes is believed to stem from members of poor parishes dressing up to imitate saints for All Saints' Day, because they couldn't afford to display relics of saints, as was the custom in more affluent parishes.

Doing this research about Halloween was interesting.. I had no knowledge of Halloween's pre-Christian origins, or of its Christian significance. I don't recall ever being taught anything about Halloween. It was simply a time to dress up and go trick-or-treating, and to soap windows, and to throw toilet paper into the yards of nasty neighbors.

Writing this book has prompted me to stop celebrating holidays mindlessly, without asking myself what I am celebrating, and why. I, thus wondered what I should do about Halloween. I found that I did not strongly identify with the Celtic, Witchcraft, or Christian origins of Halloween that I had learned about in my research. I obviously could not change Halloween into a New Year's celebration and October 31st is pretty far away from actual harvest time (where I live in Michigan) to use it as a harvest festival. So I

Halloween

(Continued)

decided to just leave it as a fun filled holiday without much deep meaning to it. There are plenty of other holidays during the year with a deep spiritual or political meaning, so having a "pure fun" holiday seemed like a good custom.

As a young adult, I continued to enthusiastically celebrate Halloween. Instead of trick-or-treating, I went to dances and parties or ball hopping in costume. Now that I am a full-fledged grown-up I don't get invited to many parties and I feel too old for bar hopping! So focus has become to provide Halloween fun for the kids in my neighborhood. I am 100% committed to reserving Halloween night for staying home and handing out candy to kids.

I take great pride in being a "good house" for trick or treating. I spend about \$40.00 on candy. I buy various different kinds of candy that I know kids like but that have very little artificial flavors and dyes in them and make little baggies full of candy. I love to see the kids' eyes light up when they see the generous portion of candy I plunk into their bags. Occasionally I find theatre sized candy bars on sale for \$1.25 each instead of the usual \$1.79, and I buy \$60.00 worth of those big Kit Kat or Nestle Crunch or Hershey. The kids eyes really light up for those jumbo candy bars, especially because they get to pick which of the three they want! I believe that giving candy is more than just the act itself. It is sending a message to the kids in your sphere of influence that you, as an adult, care about them enough to spend some of your money and time on them. It says you think kids' needs are important. I get a fair number of teenagers in my neighborhood and

Halloween

(Continued)

that is a particularly good message to send them. I also dress up every year which the kids really enjoy. I also put Halloween lights on my stairs and bushes so it looks very festive.

I also dress up in costume every Halloween at whatever job I have, even professional jobs. It is so refreshing to see people smile and laugh all day long as they unexpectedly confront an extra-terrestrial beauty contestant with a green and purple face with hair ratted out six inches in every direction, or R2D2 on roller-skates with LCD lights that lit up, to name a couple of my most popular costumes. Sometimes, I carry a little basket and give out candy to adults too. It's nice to forget all about the world's troubles for a day and just be playful and silly.

NOVEMBER

Thanksgiving

According to Wikipedia, the origin of Thanksgiving in the United States is as follows:

"Americans commonly trace the Thanksgiving holiday to a 1621 celebration at the Plymouth Plantation where settlers held a harvest feast after a successful growing season."

Life was quite harsh back then, so there was an incredible feeling of thankfulness when all the food was harvested, processed and stored, so that there was enough food to last through the coming winter.

Thanksgiving

(Continued)

However, the celebration time and the nature of the holiday changed over the next few decades and it took awhile for it to be designated as a national holiday. It changed from being a holiday about giving thanks for the harvest, to become more of just a general day of thanks to God as provider to humanity. George Washington, on October 3, 1789 made the following proclamation and created the first Thanksgiving Day designated by the national government of the United States of America:

"Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor, and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me "to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.

Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be. That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks, for his kind care and protection of the People of this Country previous to their becoming

Thanksgiving

(Continued)

a Nation, for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of his providence, which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war, for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed, for the peaceable and rational manner, in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national One now lately instituted, for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed; and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and in general for all the great and various favors which he hath been pleased to confer upon us."

Cited in Wikipedia, 2014

It was Abraham Lincoln seventy-four years later, on October 3, 1863, who finally made Thanksgiving a permanent national holiday, again not really focused on the harvest, but just general thankfulness:

"It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and voice by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the

Thanksgiving (Continued)

Heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to his tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and Union."

Cited in Wikipedia, 2014

I would definitely have preferred that Thanksgiving had remained a thanksgiving harvest festival and be celebrated in August during actual harvest time. But since November is when we all have time off from work and kids from school, for practical reasons I need to conform to Thanksgiving being in November. To satisfy my desire for a harvest oriented holiday I created an additional new holiday for myself in August called Harvest Celebration Day (See description under August). So as was declared by Abraham Lincoln, when he made Thanksgiving a national holiday, I use my holiday celebration of Thanksgiving in November to be more of a general kind of thankfulness and gratitude. Since I am not a Christian, I will of course remove the references to God the Father.

Thanksgiving

(Continued)

I partake of a typical Thanksgiving dinner. However, I do tend add salad to the meal or a green vegetable like broccoli rather than useless calories vegetables like corn or green beans smothered in a rich sauce. I also try to eat heartily, but not gorge myself --- better to save some food for leftovers. I also try to eat minimally for two days before Thanksgiving so I do not gain pounds that are very hard to take back off as the winter season approaches and it is not easy to be outside to walk or bike.

Speaking of limiting one's food consumption before Thanksgiving, there is a something you can do every Thanksgiving season to help those who will not have the privilege of sitting down to a table of plentiful food. For more than thirty years, Oxfam America, an extremely reputable, international food relief organization, has held a fast on the Thursday before Thanksgiving. You make a pledge to fast for a meal and then donate the money you would have spent to Oxfam for it's hunger programs. You can find out more about this at www.oxfam.org.

Obviously you can arrange your own personal version of this which would not have to involve an actual fast. You could perhaps not eat desserts for the week before Thanksgiving, or eat only basic foods like beans and rice for dinner for a few nights and donate three days of your typical grocery and snack money to Oxfam.

Another way I observe Thanksgiving is to try to engage in "thanks giving" type of conversation with my extended family members during our holiday get together. I try to ask every person in the room "What

Thanksgiving

(Continued)

things are you particularly thankful for this past year?”.

I also try to either write something to read at the dinner, or bring a inspirational reading. I think when you say your Thanksgiving grace in a new way each year it has more power and effect. Here is an inspirational reading I wrote in 2014, which you are welcome to bring to your table:

Thanksgiving Reading

Thanksgiving is a day we have set aside for giving thanks. Let us take a few minutes to remind ourselves that thankfulness is always a choice. We choose our reactions in life--to all the comes our way. We can choose to become bitter and resentful, Or we can choose to accept that our human existence will always have challenges, and remain thankful for all the good things in our lives.

It is not healthy to deny our pain, or repress our tears. It is even healthy to express our anger when bad things happen to us.

Maybe we had some tough losses this year. Perhaps we lost our job, or a deep relationship ended, or death touched our lives. Or we are struggling with illness.

But, we must remember that happiness lies in moving on from these setbacks, and returning to a place of appreciation. Let us today make room in our hearts for thankfulness—

For the gift of life itself,

For the blue skies, the beauty of the trees and flowers,

For the love and nurturing we receive from those we have close relationships with, and the boundless affection of our pets.

For the precious free time we have to ponder the wonders of the universe, to play, to listen to a symphony.

Let us also be thankful for the bountiful feasts we partake of on days like today.

*May we find the courage and strength to move on from whatever challenges we are confronting, with the support of our loved ones,
And find a renewed thankfulness for this precious life we have been given.*

Thanksgiving (Continued)

There is also a fantastic song about Thanksgiving by the folk singer Sally Rogers that you might want to download and play as part of your Thanksgiving celebration. It is called Thanksgiving Eve.

One other thing worth mentioning. I was recently asked by a friendly young cashier the day after Thanksgiving "Did you have a nice "Turkey Day?". Though I appreciated his friendly overture, I sure hope this is not a trend, to start referring to Thanksgiving as Turkey Day, and lose the whole concept of the holiday as a time focused on giving thanks. I don't think eating turkey, even a great turkey dinner, in and of itself, is worthy of a holiday celebration!

Epilogue

The world, in many ways, seems to get crazier and crazier. Humanity has some real serious problems to grapple with: wars, starvation and poverty, ecological pollution and global warming,, violent crime, a spiraling drug addiction and suicide rate, sexism, racism; the list goes

Epilogue

(Continued)

on and on. Participating in meaningful rituals helps me cope with the insanity I encounter every day in the newspapers, on TV, and in my everyday life.

Meaningful holiday celebrations can be a time to reaffirm that, however sick the world may be, I can continue to walk my own path to personal growth and enlightenment. Gathering together with other people who share similar visions is comforting and inspiring. I hope this information has generated ideas for creating your own empowering holidays.