

QUESTION of the MONTH: 'As a Buddhist, how do you celebrate the holidays?'

As a Buddhist, I celebrate the holiday season just as I do of the rest of the year — with great joy and happiness in my heart. Every day I am granted another 24 hours to make a difference is cause enough for celebration....

The benefit of my practice is to see clearly that friends and family tend to get caught up in the moment. Good cheer, merriment and the festive mood are expressed everywhere during the holidays, but once the season is over people return to the mundane life of just existing. As a Buddhist my greatest perception of the holiday season boils down to one important aspect — and that is the true value of every human life. And that is my greatest cause to celebrate, holiday or not!

Life is full of wonderful treasures, and Buddhism teaches me to see the beauty in life and how to appreciate it. It is so simple to me. I am so thankful for my practice and my SGI family, because I have the ability to be truly happy throughout the year. Not only does this celebration of life exist inside of me, but through my practice I have learned to open up my treasure chest and have the ability to share all my jewels with friends and family.

— GAY ALEXANDER, Kentucky

I enjoy watching the many versions of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. The transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge following his visits by the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future makes me feel hopeful that each individual no matter how mean or selfish has an opportunity to change! To me this parallels our Buddhist view of human revolution and the eternity of life! I also spend time with friends and family feasting on the multi-ethnic foods that are served.

— JOANNE TACHIBANA, Honolulu

While we strive to do things for others all year round, the holiday season is a great time to really reach out to our friends and families. As my wife says, "It is a time for caring, for sharing, for giving and for cherishing." Cherishing the supreme sanctity of life in ourselves and in the lives of all others is the basis for my special efforts to say a special thank you to those around me at Thanksgiving and through till the year's end.

— PHIL SIMPSON, Atlanta

Most of family lives back East. Every Christmas, we all converge on my parents' house in Connecticut for a good old fashioned New England Christmas dinner. Every year I use this opportunity to chant daimoku and strongly pray for my family's health and prosperity. These family reunions seem to get better every year, because as my practice develops my prayers become stronger every year. After Christmas, I come back to Seattle and celebrate New Year's with my wife and my SGI family. Together with my friends at New Year's gongyo, we make a great determination for the coming year.

— BILL LAWRENCE, Seattle

New York City looks magical, but it's also a desperately manic mass episode of Hell, Hunger, Anger and Animality followed by just Hell and Hunger in the cold months when the bills come due. At our Thanksgiving, after a splendid dinner, we draw lots, the rule being that we are each allowed but one gift (for under \$50). On the Day, we dine and then gather in a circle, taking photos of ourselves savoring gifts.

— MARK ANTON, New York

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The holidays have always been recognized as a family time. We love and appreciate this colorful season. This year only three out of six grandchildren will be baking cookies to send to our family members and friends in far away places. This labor of love is our way of expressing the appreciation for the fortune experienced during our family's 30 years of practice. This year we are extending ourselves by sharing cookies and time at a rehab center for women and children of substance abuse. — ELAINE RUCKER, Fresno, Calif.

How to celebrate the holiday season has changed dramatically through the years of my practice. At first, I felt confused and didn't know what to do because my parents are Jewish and my husband is Japanese. Neither one of us celebrated Christmas as children. Even so, I will decorate a tree in the SGI colors of red, yellow and blue and light Hanukkah candles so my children do not feel alienated from American society.

— JACALYN NUMAGAMI, Pottstown, Pa.

Last year, the Santa Fe SGI-USA members gathered together for a Christmas Eve gongyo and potluck and participated in the Santa Fe traditional *farolito* walk. The *farolito* walk happens only on Christmas Eve, on Canyon Road and surrounding streets, as traffic is rerouted and paper bags with candles (*farolitos*) line the unlit, small cobblestone streets with bonfires (*luminarios*) scattered throughout. These traditional fires are symbolic of the fires set to light the way so that pioneers on the Santa Fe Trail in days past could find their way in inclement weather. This is a truly beautiful event and is filled with community togetherness, as people from all walks of life come together to share this time on this one night of the year. This event last year was the best-attended "activity" for the local SGI community, and the unanimous consensus was that it was the best Christmas Eve we had spent in many years. This year, Christmas Eve gongyo will be followed by a visit from Santa Claus for the younger members, in addition to the smashing of a Santa Claus piñata and, of course, the *farolito* walk. Santa Fe members will also be hosting their first-ever New Year's gongyo at a local landmark hotel, with participants from outlying northern communities.

— KIM MELLOR, Santa Fe, N.M.

At this time of year, I take the opportunity to reflect on my actions of the past year, what I've learned from those actions and how I've grown. Then I make fresh determinations for my life and my mission for kosen-rufu.

The most important aspect for me, at this time of year, is when I see the worried, stressed and depressed faces of all the people running through the malls and shopping centers, most of whom are spending money that they don't have, thinking, "How am I going to pay my bills?" and feeling guilty if they don't buy something and guilty if they do — all in the name of a religion.

At this time, I feel an overwhelming sense of appreciation for Nichiren Daishonin, presidents Makiguchi, Toda and Ikeda and all the pioneers of the SGI for all of their painstaking efforts for the sake of the Law and kosen-rufu that have enabled me to have the Gohonzon, chant the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra and feel totally free from any guilt. To practice a religion that, instead of fostering guilt and judgment, lifts your life-condition as high into the universe as you want to go, to have all your wildest dreams actually attainable, is an invaluable gift to celebrate every day of your life.

— BRENDA MARSHALL, Baltimore, Md.

Thanks to all who responded!

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