



The Enlightenment



A Mini-Journal of the Humanist Association of London and Area
Visit Our Web Site at www.humanists-london.org

Volume12

Number 13

Special Issue

December 2016

Celebrating the Winter Solstice



Winter Solstice at Stonehenge

Solstice Celebration

The occurrence of the longest night and the shortest day has been celebrated by humans for several millennia, and will continue to be observed as long as people inhabit the earth. At this time of the winter Solstice, we celebrate the demise of the old year, and the birth of the new. The day after the Solstice night, the New Year gives birth to a little more light every day. This life-giving sunlight returns each day to stay just a little longer. This ever-increasing light and warmth is what instills new life on our earth.

The changing of the seasons always held a deep fascination for humans. They celebrated it in hundreds of different ways, in hundreds of languages, in thousands of different places on our earth. All these celebrations had one unique element in common. It was meant to be the symbol of hope. Humans decorated their dwellings with boughs of evergreens to symbolize the eternal circle of life, as well as the birth and the promise of renewal and the hope for continuity. So rather than celebrating the birthday of an individual, humanists celebrate, shall we say, the rebirthday of mother earth. (*Continued on page 2*).

Thousands of years ago, humans crouched by fires waiting for the first rays of the rising sun. It was all magic to those early people who unknowingly and instinctively felt promise and hope in the warm sunlight of the new life to come. But even though much of the magic has evaporated, as astronomers and other scientists have taught us how the tilt of the earth causes the seasons to evolve, we as humans are still enthralled by the splendors of metamorphosis as melting snows give way to budding trees, to blooming of flowers and bursting greenery. All this to be followed by warmer days and later the splendor of the colours of autumn before winter takes hold again. And as we marvel at the wonders of nature, we also marvel at the wonders that science and technology have bestowed upon us in the last two hundred years. Those humans sitting around solstice fires thousands of year ago, could not possibly have imagined that human ingenuity and inventiveness would someday enable people to fly like a bird or communicate with a smart phone. Yes indeed, we have made progress, but unfortunately not in all areas. Humans are still killing each other, as they apparently have always done.

For centuries, humans have expressed wishes for a peaceful and prosperous world in an atmosphere of freedom without wars, but as we know, for many people, these dreams have not always come true. As we look around our world today, especially after last year's events in Paris, and turmoil in the near east, we wonder why in the 21st century, we are plagued with carnage caused to no small extent by extreme religious ideologies? What can we do as humanists, to help make the world a better place? This is the challenge we face!

As has been the custom for a number of years, HALA members participated in a winter Solstice celebration at the 427 Wing near the London airport on December 3rd. As we lit our candles, we joined our ancient forefathers with a pledge that we must carry this light to all peoples who love this earth, who seek freedom, who understand each other's differences, and are willing to unite. We agreed to tolerate diverse cultures and overcome differences that set us apart in the past. Indeed, our candles were lit, and they shone with the light of peace.

Will Solstice Celebrations Eventually Replace Christmas Celebrations?

Solstice celebrations were occurring long before the earliest celebrations of the birth of Christ. In fact, the choice of December as the month for Christmas was probably because in Christian Europe, Christmas gradually replaced December Solstice observances, which were often regarded by the Christians as being pagan in nature.

As societies become more secular, surely it would be desirable to celebrate rebirth and renewal in the form of extended daylight, rather than the birth of Jesus the Christ, a supposed supernatural son of a God who almost certainly does not exist. Instead, let's celebrate birth itself in all its forms, the first part of nature's cycle of birth, living and death, the essential characteristics and path of all living organisms, including humans.

And a compelling reason for abandoning Christmas is that it has become so commercialized that it has strayed from its original intention. The holiday puts untold stress on many individuals as they scurry among stores to buy presents for relatives and friends. Perhaps the only people who would miss Christmas would be children, but they could be compensated in other ways.

But alas, Christmas will not likely disappear any time soon. Big business organizations will continue to aggressively promote Christmas because it puts so much profit in their coffers.