



The Enlightenment



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Special Issue

HALA Winter Solstice Celebration

A very enjoyable HALA winter Solstice party was held on the evening of December 9, 2017, at the community club house in Carl and Doris Goldberg's condo complex, with thirty plus people in attendance. The pot-luck meal was great with just the right amounts of salads, casseroles and desserts. Carl not only organized a most interesting trivia contest, but also a sing-along with him playing his guitar accompanied by Ron Loxton on the harmonica and a friend of Ron's on the mandolin. HALA Board members took part in setting up tables and laying out the food. As has been the custom, President Rod composed and delivered a Solstice Meditation in a candle light setting. This Meditation is printed below, especially for those HALA members who were not able to attend.

Winter Solstice Meditation 2017

Our solstice party this evening follows a long tradition over many millennia and in many lands, of marking the longest night of the year and looking forward to the return of longer days, sunshine, and warmth. Once again, our planet Earth has made its long journey around the sun to the point where the northern hemisphere reaches its maximum tilt away from the sun. Over the past few months, the days have been getting shorter and the nights longer, and the sun's arc across the sky has been moving lower and lower toward the horizon.

For thousands of years in many different lands and cultures, the winter solstice has been a day of celebration to raise people's spirits, and to remind themselves in this time of darkness that things will get brighter again before long, and spring will eventually return.

In our modern world this time of year has become dominated by Christmas, with the ever-present religious carols playing on the radio and in the malls, images of the angels and wise men, and other reminders of the birth of Jesus in a stable 2000 years ago. Christians often complain that the true meaning of Christmas – the birth of Jesus – is being forgotten in all the Christmas shopping and gift-giving. But the reality is that it was Christians who stole the solstice in the first place! Even though no one knows the actual date of Jesus' birth, the church decided to co-opt the traditional date of the solstice, which had long been celebrated by the Romans on December 25, and turn it into the birthday of Jesus.

Indeed, most of the traditions associated with Christmas – decorated evergreen trees, decking the halls with boughs of holly, hanging mistletoe, feasting and singing, yule logs, coloured lights, gift-giving – all predated Christianity.

(Continued over-leaf)

Since ancient times, the winter solstice was a time of forgetting grudges and quarrels, showing forgiveness, and making peace with one another. It was also a time when the normal class divisions were forgotten, and the wealthy and the poor would share meals together. It was a time of spreading cheer, charity, and happiness. In Charles Dickens' well-known story, *A Christmas Carol*, Ebenezer Scrooge's radical transformation from a misanthropic, selfish miser to a generous and caring individual was not so much a religious conversion, as a rediscovery of the ancient spirit of the Winter Solstice. In fact, Jesus is never even mentioned in that story!

So as Humanists, it's time for us to take back from Christianity the true meaning of the solstice, which is really all about Humanism! This evening as we light our candles in the darkness, we join our ancestors across the centuries in reminding ourselves of the importance of human relationships, kindness, forgiveness, generosity, and love. Our family members and caring friendships bring light and warmth into our lives in times of darkness. As we share this meal together, we celebrate our kinship with one another. We are grateful for all that we have at this time of year, and we think of those who are lacking and in need. As we look forward to the return of spring, we also long for a day when humans throughout the Earth can put aside their religious dogmas and tribal animosities, find a way to live in peace, and work to preserve this Earth that sustains us all as it makes its endless journey around the sun year after year.

Happy Solstice To All

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