

THE CELEBRATION OF HUMANIST HOLIDAYS

by Marilyn Rowens

A celebration is a celebration is a celebration. But what indeed *is* a celebration? That is a question I've asked myself and so I have given myself some answers that I would like to share with you.

A celebration in the dictionary sense is to observe proper ceremonies or festivities, to perform public rituals, to proclaim certain ideas publicly, to praise or honor a person or holiday; a celebration is a time to observe being part of a community; a celebration is a time to have a good time! All of these definitions are valid for me. I have worked within these parameters in creating celebrations for Humanism and Humanistic Judaism for the last twenty years. But in my experience I have come to realize that a really meaningful celebration is the coming together of a group to touch in some way, to reach and touch each person, to validate each individual, to validate in the group where people are in their lives. A meaningful celebration provides for the acceptance and sharing of who we are, and where we are. A celebration can be a casual or a formal collaboration by the group reflecting the variety of backgrounds, perspectives, interests and special talents in which we share to some extent our struggle and relationship with the world. An effective celebration can validate our existence, can enhance our sense of self and community, can give us pleasure, can make us feel good, and can make us feel happy. A celebration is a celebration is a celebration but is *not* just a celebration! For me it has a specific goal: to inform, to touch, to validate.

How do we do it? Can we accomplish this goal? The challenge is to experiment with new ideas and techniques and see what works.

One of the techniques I have used is called *Theature* not theatre, not lecture, but a combination of *both*. It's a provocative way of presenting biography or philosophy. The written material can be a collection of quotations and general information (information one would gather for a lecture), but the reading is broken up for two or more voices. Several people participating in the reading, sitting on stools or engaging in some interaction will provide an interesting dramatic structure.

I use the cut and paste technique. A poem here, a song there, a dramatized joke to make a point. Using several voices and movements instead of one person delivering a lecture can be very very effective. Add an exciting guest speaker, light a few candles and a beautiful celebration is possible. One script can be very flexible can can be adjusted to many needs. For our last *People Day* celebration I combined a candle lighting ceremony, a dramatic narrative accompanied by some incidental music and a guest speaker. Although my opinion is biased, I believe we met my criteria for an effective celebration: to inform, to touch, to validate.

The following candle lighting ceremony can be adapted to any Humanist celebration. Quotes may be changed, new ones added, etc., etc. I call it *The Quotable Humanist*. What better way to add a little warmth to cool logic and rational thinking than by lighting a few candles.

A Candlelighting Service

(Compiled and edited by Marilyn Rowens)

THE QUOTABLE HUMANIST

- Voice #1 A Humanist is someone who believes that a human being is just as much a natural phenomenon as an animal or a plant, that the body, the mind and the soul were not supernaturally created but are products of evolution, and that we are not under the control or guidance of any supernatural being or beings, but have to rely on ourselves and our own powers. *(Julian Huxley)*
- Voice #2 It is unlikely that all Humanists would agree on the definition of the term Humanism. But Humanists should be more concerned with introducing new rules of reason rather than fighting all the old-long-won battles against theism all over again. *(The Humanist Alternative)*
- Voice #3 Humanism affirms that a person can help in fulfilling destiny by a fuller realization of his or her own personal possibilities. A strong and rich personality is the individual, unique and wonderful contribution to the psychosocial process. *(Julian Huxley)*
- Voice #4 The common thread of all forms of humanism is the use of reason as a means for solving problems. *(Jacob Bronowski)*
- Voice #5 Humanism is the use of reason in human affairs, laced with strong doses of compassion. *(Marilyn Rowens)*
- Voice #6 Today we wish to honor seven characteristics of a humanist. We light seven candles to honor Courage, Our Need For Other People, Individualism, Reason, Hope, Knowledge and Love.
(Candles arranged in a circle.)
(Read title, author, quote, and then light the candle)
- Voice #7 (Candle #1)
In Honor Of Courage; Bertrand Russell
We want to stand upon our own feet, and look fair and square at the world-its good facts, its bad facts, its beauties and its ugliness; see the world as it is and not be afraid of it. Conquer the world by intelligence and not merely by being slavishly subdued by the terror that comes from it. We ought to stand

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up and look the world frankly in the face. We ought to make the best we can of the world, even if it is not so good as we wish... A good world needs knowledge, kindness and courage; it does not need a regretful hankering after the past. It needs a fearless outlook and a free intelligence. It needs hope for the future, not looking back all the time toward a past that is dead, which we trust will be far surpassed by the future that our intelligence can create.

Voice #8

(Candle #2)

In Honor Of Our Need For Other People:

Margaret Mead

First, a child needs food and water and rest. But these are not enough. A child also needs the warmth and security of at least one other person, preferably more. A child needs a chance to grow, not only physically, emotionally and intellectually, to gratify his or her curiosity and wonder about the world. We call this a cosmic sense, a sense of identity and a sense of wonder about the world; a sense of identity and a sense of importance in one's self which one first learns by being important to a few people; one's family and school, church and friends; small groups where one is an essential person, in which somebody would mind, someone would notice, if you weren't there.

Voice #9

(Candle #3)

In Honor of Individualism: Carl Rogers

People have long felt themselves to be but puppets in life-molded by economic forces, by unconscious forces, by environmental forces. They have been enslaved by persons, by institutions, by theories of psychological science. But they are firmly setting forth a new declaration of independence. They are discerning the alibis of unfreedom. They are choosing themselves, endeavoring, in a most difficult and often tragic world, to become themselves-not puppets, not machines, but their own unique individual self.

Voice #10

(Candle #4)

In Honor of Reason: Bertrand Russell

It is not the business of reason to generate emotions, though it may be part of its function to discover ways of preventing such emotions as are an obstacle to well-being. To find ways of minimizing hatred and envy is no doubt part of the function of a rational psychology. But it is a mistake to suppose that in minimizing these passions we shall at the

same time diminish the strength of those passions which reason does not condemn. In passionate love or art, in parental affection, in friendship, in benevolence, in devotion to science or art, there is nothing that reason should wish to diminish. The rational man, when he feels any or all of these emotions will be glad that he feels them and will do nothing to lessen their strength, for all these emotions are parts of the good life, the life, that is, that makes for happiness both in oneself and in others.

Voice #11 (Candle #5)

In Honor Of Hope: Sherwin Wine

Hope is the other side of self esteem. It is the affirmation of competence. It is an invitation to respect. When we take pleasure in our own strength, when we enjoy our own power, we release their possibilities. We take responsibility. Hope is not a guarantee. It is a lifestyle. Hope enable us to see the familiar with a fresh perspective. Only human beings can hope.

Voice #12 (Candle #6)

In Honor Of Knowledge: Algernon Black

Our philosophy begins and ends with people and is concerned with the lives of people penetrating other human lives. We live in a natural world in a condition of limited knowledge and power. We sense there are still areas for investigation. And very important is the exploration of our own psychological and spiritual natures and the interrelationships of life with life. But we must continue growing beyond accepting the dogmas and horizons of the past. Out of human knowledge we gain a sense of life's possibilities.

Voice #13 (Candle #7)

In Honor Of Love: Eric Fromm

For the productive character, giving has an entirely different meaning. Giving is the highest expression of potency. In the very act of giving, I experience my strength, my wealth, my power. This experience of heightened vitality and potency fills me with joy. I experience myself as overflowing, spending, alive, hence as joyous. Giving is more joyous than receiving, not because it is a deprivation, but because in the act of giving lies the expression of my aliveness.

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Music

Voice #14

This circle.
This circle of flames
Of Courage, Our Need For Other People,
Individualism, Reason,
Hope, Knowledge, and Love,
Flickers before us,
Not in permanent shapes
But constantly changing.
Our seven characteristics of Humanism
Are not in themselves a final goal
But an ongoing, changing process
That can help us endure the pain
And enjoy the pleasure
Of an unpredictable
But challenging and exciting future!