

HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

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Shichigosan
Shee—chi —goh--sahn

Shichigosan is also called the Feast of the Living children. Celebrated on November 15, it is a day of thanksgiving honoring 7 year old girls, 5 year old boys, and all 3 year old children, because they have survived a critical period of childhood. The children are presented by their parents at a shrine. After their presentation, they have their picture taken and receive a gift of “candy” for a thousand years”. This is long sticks of red and white candy in a bag printed with pictures of a crane and a tortoise (symbols of good fortune and long life). The children are also given balloons.

Traditionally, this is the first time that a 3 year old wears her hair fully dressed in the fashion of the mother. The first time a 5 year old boy wears a long kimono, and the first time that a seven year old girl puts on a stiff obi, or a wide kimono belt. In America, Japanese children are more likely to wear bright colored clothes to reflect their joy and thankfulness.

SUKKOT
Soo—c ot

Sukkot, Is a Jewish holiday observed in Sept. or Oct. celebrates the harvest and commemorates the 41 year period after the Exodus from Egypt, during which the Jews wandered in the wilderness and lived in huts made of branches. A hut or a booth called sukkah (succah) is built of boards or canvas in the garden near the house or at the synagogue. The top of the sukkah is made of pine branches through which the stars can shine at night. Flowers, vegetables, and fruit are woven into the branches or hung by children in the hut for decoration.

During the festival, as many meals as possible are eaten in the sukkah and always include harvest fruits and vegetables. Apple slice (a baked dough with apples like a strudel) and rolled strudel are frequently served. It is customary to invite guests, especially those who do not have a sukkah of their own. Some people like to sleep in the sukkah at night. Sukkot is celebrated for eight days. by orthodox and conservative Jews both in and outside of Isreal . On the last day of Sukkot, Jews thank God for the Torah in a ceremony called Simhat Torah (rejoicing in the law). Although associated with the Sukkot, this is actually a separate holiday that comes after

Festival of lights

Candles were one of the first sources of man-made light. Therefore, it is not surprising that they have been used extensively in religious ceremonies and

festivals not only for the light they provide but for the beauty and symbolic meaning they have acquired throughout the world. Many families use candles in their daily or weekly religious observances at home and in their homes of worship.

Candle lighting is a very real part of family celebrations in the United States. Birthdays are usually celebrated by giving presents and serving birthday cake lighted with one candle for each year of life. Weddings, anniversaries, showers, and dinner parties often feature lighted candles. Candle making is a hobby for many. Candles are created in all shapes, sizes, colors, and scents. Candles can also serve as emergency lighting when the electricity goes off.

The Greeks and Romans, we know, used torches to light their celebrations, particularly those held after dark. The Olympic games of the ancient Greeks, held on the plains at the base of Mt. Olympus, were opened with an impressive torch-lighted ceremony. The Olympic flame was lighted with a torch that was carried by hand all the way from Olympia, Greece to Athens. This tradition is still carried on today, with the torch lit by the sun (and a magnifying glass) and carried by train, ship, or plane, then car, skies, or sled to the Olympic games.

Ashura (A-shoora)

This holiday of thanksgiving is celebrated sometime during February by Moslems to commemorate their joy in Noah and his family's survival of the Flood and the sparing of humankind. According to legend, Noah asked his wife to prepare a special pudding on the day he was able to set foot on land after the flood. She gathered dates, figs, and grapes, nuts, and currants in great quantities and prepared the largest pudding ever made. The pudding was called *Ashura*. On this holiday a similar pudding is prepared and eaten by Moslems as an expression of thanksgiving.

Kwanza (Keh-WAHN -zah)

This special holiday, celebrated by some black American Families from December 26th to January 1st, is in recognition of traditional African harvest Festivals. In the African language Kiswahili, *kwanza* means "first fruits." In the United States, the holiday originally began as an alternative to the highly commercialized version Christmas; It starts on Christmas day and lasts for an entire week, with special parties on successive days, and often ends with a community-wide harvest feast and party on the seventh day. Small gifts are traditionally given on each day. The kwanza holiday stresses the unity of the black family. Often, homemade or homegrown gifts, such as pecan pralines, molasses peanut brittle, molasses bread, and fruit are given.

Seven lessons associated with observing this holiday and a key word for each are listed below:

1. Umoja (unity) We must stand together.
2. kujichagulia (self-determination) We must decide in our own way.
3. *ujima* (cooperation) We must work together.
4. *ujamaca* (sharing by all) We must share what we have.
5. *kuumba* (creativity) We need to use creativity in reflecting pride in and in caring for our community.
6. *nia* (purpose) We must have a purpose in life to make a better world.
7. *imani* (faith) We need to have faith which will result in works and action

Customs of the Traditional African Holiday

1. Lighting candles called *mishumaas* to remind people to live and build together.
2. Placing candles in the *kinara* (candleholder) on a straw mat called the *nikeka* in the center of the table.
3. Holding a feast on the last day of Kwanza during which everyone drinks from a unity cup called the *kikombe*.
4. Giving each child an ear of corn. This corn is called *mihindi*.
5. Giving gifts on the last day. These love gifts are called *zawadi*.

The following recipe is a traditional African treat. It is associated with *John Canoe*, the celebration that African slaves held at Christmas time. It also can be enjoyed by children during *kwanza*.

Sweet Potato Candy

- 1 lb. sweet potatoes (2 cups)
- 2 cups sugar (1 brown, 1 white)
- 1 tsp. lemon juice
- 1 cup marshmallows (optional).

1. Wash and boil sweet potatoes.
2. Cool, peel, and mash potatoes in a colander to
3. Place in a pan and add lemon juice, sugar, and
4. Cook over low flame, stirring constantly
5. Set aside to cool.
6. Add vanilla and/or other flavoring.
7. Spoon out candy into paper cups.
8. Dust with powdered sugar, Or sprinkle with sugar

Candlemas

Candlemas is a very old church holiday. It was a Jewish custom for every mother to go to the temple forty days after the birth of her First son and “present him to the Lord.” Thus the Christian Bible has recorded that Mary took Jesus to the temple on the appointed day. It also states a devout man named Simeon said that Jesus was to become a light to lighten the Gentiles.” In the Roman Catholic Church the lighting of candles and the Candlemas ceremony are held in honor of this event and also in honor of the Virgin Mary. On this day they bless all the candles that will be used in the church services throughout the year. Some Protestant churches also celebrate Candlemas in early February.

In Luxembourg, after blessing the candles, the boys and girls visit shut-ins and the elderly and sing songs about lights. In Mexico, the sacred doll that was placed in the crèche on Christmas Eve is removed. It is dressed and put on a tray decorated with flowers. In some churches the godfather and godmother (or sponsors) presiding at the last *Las Posadas* give a Fiesta for the others who were present at the ceremony. (See Christmas around the World guide,)

Extended Experiences

1. Visit a nearby church to see lighted candles or decorations with candles and flowers [or a special occasion such as a wedding or Christmas.
2. Display pictures of candles used in churches or synagogues.

St. Lucia's Day

On December 13th, many Christian countries in Europe celebrate St. Lucia's Day. St. Lucia was put to death by the Romans 1500 years ago for her Christian beliefs, and later was made a saint, in Italy, large bonfires are built and there are candle and torchlight processions.

In Sweden, a young girl, usually the oldest daughter, dresses up in a long white dress tied with a red sash and places a crown of evergreens adorned with glowing candles on her head. Traditionally, it is her task to serve coffee and special twisted buns with raisins to her family at daybreak. The buns are twisted into different shapes called Lucia's Crown, Lucia Cats' Eyes, Star Boy, and Lucia Cats' Tails; the favorite being one called “Lucia cats.”