

## ***Incorporating Seasonal Festivals into Your Program***

Once one has identified a desire to bring seasonal festivals to the children in an early childhood program or in one's home, the question comes: How does one do this in a conscious way that imbues the festivals with meaning and depth?

Steiner was very clear that the festivals are a way for mankind to reach deeper levels of being, and he was equally clear that it is the way in which the festivals are held by adults working with children that is of utmost importance, not the outer trappings. In other words, nothing fancy, expensive, or materialistic is necessary to acknowledge the festivals -- the most important aspect is the way the festivals and their meanings are held inwardly by the caregiver. Indeed, many of us come from families in which the preparation of the outer appearances of a festival left our parents exhausted and depleted, or in which the main focus was on what we would receive as gifts. Unfortunately, as a consequence, what is recalled in our unconscious around festivals may well be stress, disappointment, and a distrust in anything "magical".

It is the mood and the impulse brought to the holiday that children carry with them into adulthood, not necessarily the physical components -- does anyone actually remember gift they received for their 3rd Christmas? But one does recall, deep inside, the smells of the food cooking in the kitchen, the sounds of voices singing around the piano (perhaps one song in particular will "bring it all back"), the way the lights on the tree seemed to create a glow, the sense of wonder and the feeling of warmth, closeness and belonging....Thus, as caregivers bringing the seasonal festivals to children, we must try to translate the impulse of the festival into the language of the senses.

One must identify which of the seasonal festivals resonate with, have meaning for, or live within oneself. In order to hold the true impulse of a festival and bring it to the children, it must come from a place of genuineness, or it will lack depth and merely be a hollow shell or facade. Unfortunately in our age it seems that this is the case societally with so many of our festivals -- they have been reduced to the mere "acting out" of their themes, just shadows of their original intent and ancient meanings. Find which festivals "speak" to you now and start with those, bringing to them what lives inside of you.

One must also take into consideration the ages and developmental stages of the children one is working with. For example, when doing an Advent spiral, I pay close

attention to which children might need to be held and carried into the spiral, which needs to hold a hand and walk with a parent, and which can walk on their own. To walk on their own, a child must be able to focus on the task at hand, which is walking a narrow path holding a lighted candle, but not have to focus so hard on that task that they are not still open to receive the wonder and beauty of the event. Younger children who have not been walking independently for at least a couple years may have trouble even maneuvering the spiral, let alone holding a candle and remembering the sequence of lighting it, turning around to walk back, and setting the apple down on a golden star.

When you have come to know the children in your program and have developed individual relationships with them, it will be apparent to you which activities they are capable of doing. Singing simple seasonal songs and incorporating seasonal games into your ring time are fun things that young children love. Cooking traditional foods together (and learning which foods are traditional for the children in your group) is a good way to bring the senses into play. Simple decorations, perhaps some toys that reflect a seasonal theme, and art activities that focus on creating beautiful and useful things to give to others are also ways to bring the impulse of seasonal festivals to the children.

Remember that it is not about any sheer number of festivals you can fit into your program year; it is not about blanketing the classroom setting with garish decorations; it is not about stressing out to provide the "best" experience possible. It is about carrying inside of you a peaceful sense of the time and place you are living in at that moment with the children in your life, and bringing this impulse to them so that they too can experience their own sense of belonging in the turning circle of the year.