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LETTER

Dear Readers,

We started our journey with *Psychlingo* with a Christmas issue, so it is truly a pleasure to write another letter two years later. Our mission is growing, and I am grateful to the people who actively support and help create *Psychlingo* (and I hope you are too). So, this time, I want to thank the entire team at the start — those who have been with us from the beginning, those who recently joined us in spreading knowledge, and those who are no longer involved but who gave the magazine as much as they could, making it as beautiful as one could hope. So, thank you! In this warm spirit, I also hope that you feel the warmth around you despite the winter weather. After all, it's Christmas time, and it tends to be associated with that. We tend to see December as a month of hope and peace, a time of joy, which is often true and should be the case, especially in our Christian society. But it's not always that simple. This is also a time when those lacking joy in their lives may suffer even more. In this issue, we address topics often overlooked during the festive season, such as the situation of the less fortunate, the difficulties involved in simple acts like giving, and more. I hope you enjoy it. And lastly (but certainly not least), I would like to thank you, dear readers, for being with us all this time. So enjoy your reading.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



Jan Jolteki
Editor-in-Chief



Historical Outline of Christmas Traditions

BY AMELIA MOKIJEWSKA

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Slavic ancestors, who celebrated "Szczodre Gody," which began on the night of the winter solstice and lasted several days



Christmas celebrations are anticipated by many for a wide range of reasons: adults want to reunite with their families, children expect gifts and winter outdoor activities, religious people contemplate and fulfil their annual rituals, while some enjoy their days off from work. In the modern world, Christmas can take on different meanings for each individual. While our traditions are often taken at face value, seemingly obvious in their nature, it is worth taking some time to reflect on the origins of Christmas and all its beloved practices.

The reason we celebrate Christmas on this specific date remains a mystery, still waiting to be explained. There are two primary schools of thought on the matter, both unfortunately lacking compelling evidence to disprove the other. One theory holds that early Christians calculated December 25 as the date of Jesus' birth, based on the idea that a holy person's conception coincides with his death. According to some sources, Christ's crucifixion took place on March 25; adding nine months to this date would result in December 25.

Another theory argues that the Church wanted to displace Dies Natalis Invicti, Roman festivities celebrating the birthday of Sol Invictus, which occurred during the winter solstice and was calculated in the Julian calendar as December 25. Sol Invictus, the "Unconquered Sun", was an ambiguous god of the Sun, thought to have an undefined form of being, somewhere in between a personified god and a heavenly body. The Sun was often used as a symbol of eternity, especially when paired with the Moon; for this reason, Steven Hijmans argues that the Sun's general symbolism explains why early Christians chose this date.

The winter solstice was a time of celebration in many cultures that embraced solar deities. Festivities were quite universally focused on honouring nature's recurring cycle and preparing for the return of light and the renewal of life. The same can be said of our Slavic ancestors, who celebrated "Szczodre Gody," which began on the night of the winter solstice and lasted several days. It is thought that they believed the new Sun replaced the old Sun associated with the god Swaróg.

During the longest night of the year, the realms of the living and the dead intermingled, allowing ancestors to visit their families, which gave rise to the custom of leaving an additional plate. Fires were lit so that souls could find their way home and partake in the feast. A didukh, a sheaf of grain, was placed in the corner of the room as a symbol of ancestors and an invitation for them to join the feast of the living. People exchanged gifts, foretold the future for the next year and shared bread with one another – the same way the Christmas wafer is shared nowadays. Carolers walked from household to household with wishes for an abundant new year. For about two weeks, people stopped their work to focus on connecting with friends and family, finding joy and laughter even in the darkest nights of the year.

Many of the traditions we attribute to Christianity were already part of Slavic pagans' annual celebrations, which we unknowingly continue. I believe it might be worthwhile to draw parallels and give the yearly winter celebrations some thought. What do they mean to us personally? Perhaps we can discover a whole new perspective that has been lost to time, or reshape it in line with our values? Personally, I think it's interesting to look at Christmas as a time of new light, a way to rest from the cold and darkness of the season, and to appreciate its significance when we later enjoy spring's gentle sun rays.

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Steven Hijmans, "Sol Invictus, the Winter Solstice, and the Origins of Christmas"



A didukh, a sheaf of grain, was placed in the corner of the room.
Photo by Eugena Pankiv on Unsplash

GLOSSARY

abundant – plentiful

ambiguous – not having one obvious meaning

conception – the process in which a baby starts to form in the uterus

displace – to remove something from its usual position

disprove – to show that something is not true

intermingle – to mix or blend together

realm – a kingdom

sheaf of grain – a tied bunch of harvested grain

solstice – the longest or shortest day

unconquered – not defeated

Why does Christmas Seem to Bring out the Good in People?

BY OLIWIA WILIWIS

As the holiday season approaches, something remarkable happens: people seem to spread kindness and engage in acts of generosity that are less common throughout the rest of the year. This phenomenon can be better understood by analysing the influence of social norms, tradition, and behavioural psychology.

1. Happiness equals kindness

The Christmas season is generally associated with joy, celebration and overall positive emotions. Music, colourful lights, and cherished traditions are there to lift our mood and warm our hearts. When people feel happier, they often experience a stronger desire to share this feeling with others through acts of kindness and generosity. During this time of year, individuals may become more aware of the needs of those around them, leading to increased charitable behaviour.

2. Religion as a moral reminder

As this event commemorates the birth of Jesus, Christians may step away from daily responsibilities and refocus on their faith. This time of year can serve as a reminder of the festival's core values: compassion and helping those less fortunate. Especially for believers who attend community gatherings, singing carols and volunteering may reinforce their sense of purpose and morality. Consequently, when people are driven by righteous values, they are genuinely encouraged to engage in prosocial behaviour.

3. The return to childhood wonder

Christmas is a holiday strongly associated with childhood wonder: waiting for Santa Claus to arrive with presents or decorating the tree. For adults, this is a time when it becomes socially acceptable to be emotional and cheerful. The daily expectation of seriousness fades away, and we embrace the once-wonder-filled spirit of Christmas. We temporarily reconnect with a carefree version of ourselves, which can make us more open, playful, and warm towards others.

4. The influence of the media

Media influence is impossible to ignore during the holiday season. We strongly associate this holiday with iconic movies whose plots often revolve around learning to forgive, reconnecting with family, and helping those in need. Watching these narratives may make us reflect and, in the end, influence our future actions through imitation. Additionally, advertisements encourage gestures that show others you care, often expressed through gift-giving. Although driven by commercial goals, this messaging still promotes the value of thinking about others' happiness. As a result, we become more mindful of those around us and more motivated to do something kind.



Photo by Eugenia Pan'kiv on Unsplash

GLOSSARY

charitable – kind and generous, especially by helping people in need

cherished – loved and valued very much; treasured

commemorate – to remember and show respect for someone or something

embrace – to welcome something enthusiastically

messaging – sending information or ideas, usually by text or social media

mindful – to be careful not to forget about something

reinforce – to make something stronger; strengthen





PHOTO BY JEM SAHAGUN ON UNSPLASH

Is Christmas Always a Joyful Experience?

BY AGATA STUGIENT

Why isn't Christmas the same for everyone?

Do you already feel it? The warmth from the fireplace in a nearby winter cottage, a sweet and pleasant smell from a glass full of hot chocolate, as well as the bright lights all over the streets, whenever your evening walk takes you to the old town. And this is just a small piece of the puzzle compared to the whole picture of what Christmas looks like to most of us. When we think of this time of year, we're usually reminded of the warm, fuzzy feeling we get inside whenever we see winter decorations or think about all the gifts we're going to give our loved ones. The wonderful atmosphere of joy, love and the celebration of another year spent in our close circle of friends. But what if I told you that not everyone associates Christmas with such lovely feelings? What if I told you that for a handful of people, that time can be extremely dreadful and exhausting? When we talk about winter holidays, we must include the experiences of those who don't get a break from their struggles, as we do from work. People who suffer from mental health issues have to deal not only with their symptoms but also with the social pressure put on them.

Don't we all expect others to enjoy that time as much as we do? However sensible that sounds, we must acknowledge that their experiences can be drastically different from ours. How does that happen, you might ask. Let me dive a little bit deeper into that.

A word about depression

To truly understand the hardships that people with mental health issues go through during the holidays, it is only right to first talk about some of their daily struggles. To everybody who has experienced prolonged low mood, little to no energy and irritability, you might have an insight into the internal world of those who are severely depressed. If you are interested in psychology, you probably already know that this condition shows up in multiple different ways, though. It is not only sadness and tiredness that come with it; for many people, it's a whole lot of pretending, masking, and hoping that somebody won't notice how they actually feel. And all of those symptoms are just the tip of the iceberg. But let's not go into that any further and instead focus on how those with depression deal with a period that can be especially difficult for them – Christmas.

A dreadful experience

Imagine being at your house, all of your family already sitting at the table, waiting for the host to arrive and bring the wafer to share. You see the smiling faces, you hear the jokes and laughter that come from the pure joy of being together. You try to mimic their behaviour, but nobody really sees what goes through your head and how you feel in your body. All that you can think of are the same thoughts you had for the last couple of months. You're trying to shake off the feelings of pointlessness, as well as the dark space in your head you can't seem to get out of. Being in a room full of people and yet being all alone. They don't seem to understand what is going on when you hear all of those unnecessary comments about your gloomy attitude. "Unwrapping gifts should be a joyful experience for you", they said. "Put on a smile", your mother whispered when you were helping her in the kitchen. "You could have done a better job picking out the present for our parents", your sibling told you after the party. But they didn't see the struggle or the exhaustion behind your eyes. They didn't feel the tension that you felt every time you needed to get up from your chair or act like nothing was wrong. All they saw was a person who didn't care enough to help them prepare for Christmas. All they saw was someone who preferred scrolling on their phone to looking for a perfect gift.

Meanwhile, all you truly wished for was to feel joy like everybody else. To feel present with those people whom you love so dearly. But how can you do it if you can't control your own head? It's easier in everyday life when nobody expects you to celebrate or share love. You can just disappear into your own shadow. But during Christmas, when everybody is in the spotlight, you can't seem to go off their radar so easily. More than that, when everyone shares love, you are painfully aware of how much you are missing out on, which makes it especially difficult to deal with. That means that you're not only living with your day-to-day symptoms, but with additional distress as well, and to top it all off, with the social pressure that's higher than usual.

How is it for socially anxious people?

Now, let me briefly show you how those with social anxiety might feel during Christmas. It is not an easy task to fully portray the chaotic thoughts that are going on inside an anxious person's head, but if I could speak for them, I would say that it usually involves mental and physical symptoms. Their mind feels like they're constantly "on", ruminating on how other people perceive them. Did they dress appropriately for the occasion? Did they smile enough during the conversation so that no one thought they were rude? Are they sure they picked out the perfect gift for their parents so that they won't get mad? What if someone felt that they didn't care enough for them because their present wasn't as big? Did that person look at them funny? Are other people talking about them behind their backs? All of that to make sure no one judges them or calls them rude. But it's more than just asking questions in your head. It's this constant fear that they might feel physically in their body.

Stomach ache, low appetite and a feeling of dizziness are all signs of extreme anxiety. They worry about being judged, being called stupid or odd, and causing others to have negative feelings towards them. Even though they experience it daily, Christmas might be especially difficult for them. To put it simply, the dread in the days or even weeks before can be enough to cause additional distress to an already dysregulated nervous system. This is just another example of why holidays might not be as joyful for some people as they are for most of us.

How can we support them? A summary

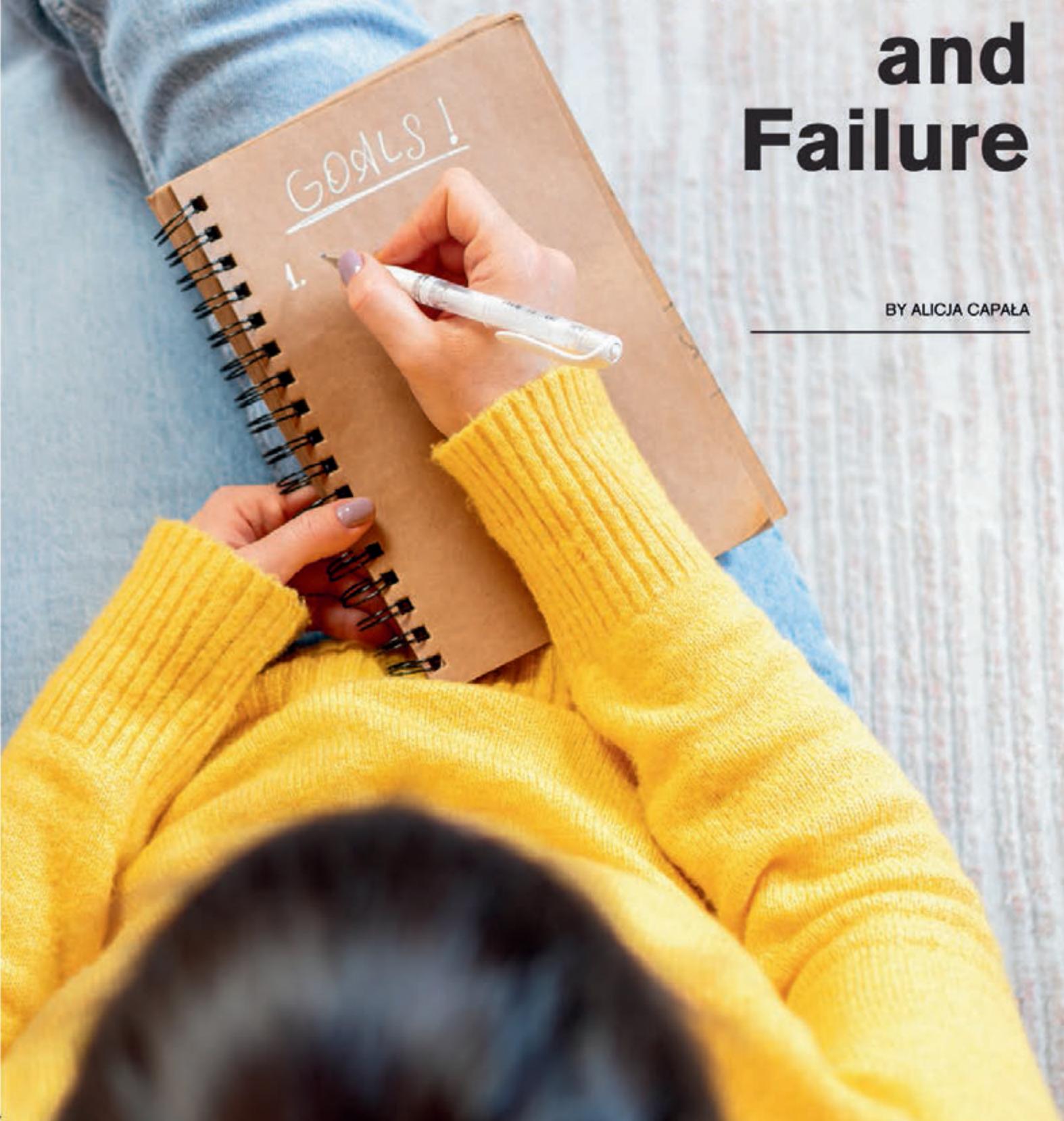
What else can be said on this topic? I think we would need to gather a lot of additional information and real-life experience to truly understand what many go through during Christmas or other important holidays. I wanted to share those thoughts with you, though, because we must make an effort to understand others, who might not be looking forward to this as much as we do. If any of you notice concerning symptoms in yourself or your loved ones, there are resources available to help. What else can you do? Research has found that simply being with a person, showing them your support, and listening when they need someone to talk to can be extremely helpful. It can make a person feel less lonely, helping them get through Christmas with a little more ease. I encourage you to stop for a moment today and reflect on whether anyone around you might be struggling, and how you can best show them they're not alone. If you're struggling yourself, don't be afraid to reach out for help; everyone needs a little support from time to time. With that thought in mind, I want to wish you all a great rest of the day and lots of love this Christmas.

GLOSSARY

- distress** – intense worry or pain
- dread** – to feel extremely worried about something that might or is going to happen
- go off the radar** – to stop being noticed
- gloomy** – unhappy and without hope
- handful** – a small number of people or things
- hardship** – something that causes difficulty or suffering
- in the spotlight** – receiving a lot of public attention
- mimic** – to copy someone or something
- miss out on** – to lose the chance to do or enjoy something
- pointlessness** – the lack of meaning or purpose
- ruminate** – to think carefully and for a long time about something
- shake sth off** – to get rid of something that is causing you problems
- social anxiety** – a feeling of worry and nervousness that some people experience in social situations

"New Year, New Me?" The Psychology Behind Resolutions and Failure

BY ALICJA CAPAŁA



There is a famous saying, "New Year, new me", which brings us to two connected topics: why people make New Year's resolutions, and why so many of them are quickly abandoned. Many of us enter the upcoming year with high expectations and a strong desire for change.

In the time leading up to New Year's Eve, we often feel a kind of pressure – sometimes even a "toxic" one – especially after spending Christmas with the family. We compare our lives to those of our relatives, and suddenly, we want what they already have. On top of that, the New Year is often portrayed as a fresh start, a psychological border that motivates change and helps us break free from past failures.

We also feel the need to improve our quality of life, reflecting on past bad habits that have lowered our well-being, so we set New Year's resolutions to welcome positive changes. Another key factor behind it is social pressure, and how many people feel obligated to change something just because everyone around them is talking about it and posting their resolutions on social networks. Hence, the resolutions are becoming a new social norm. Also, people have this natural need for self-development, and resolutions are just an excuse to pursue better health, looks, skills or relationships.

It's also worth noting that the end of the year is a personal moment. This often encourages reflection on various aspects, recognising what didn't work out or what went missing, which brings us to setting specific goals for the upcoming year.

Why do people break their resolutions?

It's relatively easy to plan to do something, but actually doing it is a whole new thing. Some aspects make it easier to give up on your New Year's resolutions.

Firstly, it's setting yourself unrealistic or overly ambitious goals, such as quitting destructive habits altogether (e.g., scrolling on IG, watching TikToks, smoking, or drinking). Going to the gym every day despite not having exercised for months, or trying to write an entire book without having written anything longer before – all of this can quickly lead to frustration and resignation.

Another common mistake is forgetting that the resolution alone is not enough. Without concrete steps, a schedule and a strategy, it's hard to maintain motivation and consistency. Additionally, without monitoring progress, offering small rewards, setting achievable goals, and building a new routine, it's easy to return to old habits.

Moreover, falling back into the old routine is quite tempting because it often brings us comfort (our brains like automatic habits) and the feeling that we don't need to try too hard, compared with the new lifestyle, which requires a lot of self-discipline and perseverance. After a few weeks, when the "New Year's euphoria" fades, keeping up with resolutions becomes harder, while real change requires time and consistency.



It's also more challenging to stay committed to your aims when no one from your surroundings (friends or family members) supports your goals or even questions them, by saying, for example, "Why do you do it?", "Give it up".

What do you need to remember?

New Year's resolutions reflect our hopes, insecurities, and desire for self-improvement. But without realistic goals, a clear plan, patience, and supportive surroundings, many of them are destined to fail. Real change doesn't happen because the calendar changes – it happens when we commit to small steps, repeated consistently, long after the holiday motivation fades.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

GLOSSARY

consistency – doing something in a similar way over time

insecurity – lack of confidence; self-doubt

perseverance – a continued effort to do or achieve something even when it's difficult

pursue – to try to achieve a particular aim

upcoming – happening soon; approaching



Gift-giving and Receiving

BY MAGDA WITKOWSKA

Why do we give gifts? When do we offer them? How do we do it? Is it sometimes hard to receive a gift? Let's dive into this topic, which is not as simple as it may seem. Do you think you give presents just because you want to? Or that someone gave you something nice just because they like you? Oh, sweet summer child...

But first, a short history lesson. Since the dawn of humankind, gifts have been given. Some may even argue that this custom is older than us, since our primate relatives also bring offerings to their friends, families, and potential mates. Scientists believe that our ancestors exchanged peculiarly shaped rocks or animal parts. What for?

We want to think it is just us being nice, but let's be real – there is often a reason to give presents. We want something in exchange. Depending on whether you are a sister, spouse or sociopath (or maybe everything at once), you might desire different things. If you are a sister, you can use gifts to strengthen your social connection with your family.

This will give you a better place in your household food chain and, by doing so, improve your power over your kin, or, if you are a normal person, make you nicer to be around. If you are a spouse, gifts can help you express your love and nurture your relationship with your partner. If you give them to another, potentially new lover, it can increase your chances of luring them into a relationship with you. If you are a sociopath, you can look at offerings as nothing more than a form of transaction, merely a tool to use in order to achieve your goals. Let's dive deeper into each of these motives.

Social connections. We depend on them; we need them to survive. We are herd animals after all. Without others, we are just prey, ready to be served on a silver platter, whether we are talking about our beloved concrete jungle or the real one. We want to establish or maintain quality relations; we demand the preservation of social ties and bonds; we need our precious hierarchy, and we want to climb it. We cannot live without connections. And there is no finer time to strengthen them than on a ritual occasion, like a birthday or Christmas. In the end, we are obligated, no matter what, to give presents on these occasions, so we might as well get something out of it ourselves. What is interesting is that the value of presents increases with our genetic relatedness (though if we take into account our romantic partners, they will get pricey items and our friends will get the cheapest ones, sorry guys. But speaking of our partners...)

Next, mating strategies. We need a companion in our lives. Or at least someone to give us a womb or sperm to pass on our genes. How to get one? You are right! We can again use gifts for that. It is more common for men to resort to giving gifts to gain the interest of a potential or current mate. Though sorry, gentlemen, research suggests that women are aware that men use tactical motives when offering them gifts. So, you can keep your flowers and chocolates on Valentine's Day. However, the study also found that males who were more generous in their gift-giving were more successful at attracting and sustaining mates in short- and long-term relationships. Alas!

Furthermore, we need to ask ourselves, is giving gifts just a tactical transaction? We can gain in the eyes of our relatives and our partners, but is that all? Well, yes and no. Because what does a transaction even mean? It means that we get something in return. But how does that work?

It is easy. Presents are just complicated. We need to give them and receive them, whether we like it or not. Once we get into this giving-receiving machine, we cannot get back. We must be givers and receivers, forever and ever, until we die in our misery circle of gift hell. We give, then the person receiving the gift feels an urge to take it and feels obligated to repay us, and when they do, we need to take the gift back and repay. Everyone is forced by social norms to accept every gift, and refusal is a hostile act that will not be taken lightly. If we take the gift, we now become dependent on the giver. And we need to repay; not only do we need to repay our lovely giver, but we also need to repay them sufficiently. If we fail to achieve that, we risk losing our status and our place in the hierarchy. But that is not all, oh no! We also cannot give something of too great value! This will create an unpleasant feeling on the other side of the transaction, thus making it obligatory to raise the stakes for the other party. Santa, the biggest giver of all, I hope you rot in hell!

Is Santa Claus really any different? He cannot expect children to give anything in return. Or can he? Well, he certainly will not receive presents in return, but he can acquire something else, maybe even more valuable than plastic trains and Barbie dolls. He can receive children's love and appreciation, or he can simply be satisfied with their joy. Okay, Santa, you can go to purgatory.

We can also give gifts without a transactional purpose, just like Santa! (Yes, Santa exists, and you cannot deny that.) Or at least exchange them with our dopamine pleasure. It can bring us joy to see our friend, child, or pet get all excited when unwrapping a present and then squeak with delight when they see what is inside. One would only hope that gift giving and receiving would be all about that...

Then again, to see someone joyful because of our presence, we need to give the right gift. How to do that? Do I look like your friend, child or pet? I do not think so, so I have no idea what they want. But if you need some guidance, I can try to lend you a hand. Here are some rules to help you choose the right present.

1. The value of the present equals its market value, combined with the effort and time you sacrificed to make it or obtain it.
2. Giving experiences is better than giving an item. It strengthens your relationship with the receiver more than an object does. It shapes stronger emotional reactions.
3. If you want the most clichéd present, here is a list of the most popular ideas: entertainment-related gifts like games, clothing, food, and drink-related gifts.

All in all, I wish you good luck on your journey as a giver and a receiver. It is not an easy path, but we all must follow it. Whether you like your family, want to manipulate them, or want others to have fun (well, I will never believe in your altruistic motives), I hope your present will amaze others. You will spend multiple hours first coming up with an idea and then trying to acquire the item you have chosen, and at last, trying to make it on time, wrapping it in colourful paper at the last minute, panicking while giving it to them because you're rushing to a Christmas, birthday, or other party. Yet, you will be pleased, knowing that now the receiver must be as creative as you, you sick, mad man. Merry giving and receiving!

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GLOSSARY

- lure** – to attract or tempt someone
- nurture** – to take care of and help something grow
- platter** – a large plate for serving food
- prey** – an animal that is hunted and killed by another animal
- primate** – an animal that is a member of the group of mammals which includes humans, monkeys, and apes
- relatedness** – being connected or related to someone or something
- squeak** – to make a short, high sound
- sustain** – to keep something going or alive

A woman with short blonde hair, wearing a Santa hat and a green and white patterned sweater, is looking thoughtfully to the side with her hand to her chin. She is holding several wrapped gifts, including one with a gold bow and another with a red and black geometric pattern. In the background, there is a lit candle and more wrapped gifts.

Christmas Loneliness. Holiday Blues and How to Deal with It

BY JULIA KAWCZAK

For years, social media and advertisements have been creating the idea of a "perfect" Christmas. Presents under a six-foot-tall Christmas tree, food that smells fabulous even over the screen and of course, love in the air. Some of us don't have that experience and associate Christmas with negative emotions, such as loneliness in a crowd or feelings of grief and mourning. Christmas is a tricky holiday because it has been so glamorised, making it easier than we think to fall into the "perfect Christmas" trap.

A condition called "holiday blues" is known in every country and can touch all of us, from older people who feel lonesome to young adults who feel overwhelmed by the time of togetherness that doesn't fill the void.

Christmas statistics reveal the sad truth: during the holidays, the risk of exacerbating the symptoms of depression and anxiety is much higher than in any other season. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), 64% of people with an existing mental illness report that the holidays make their condition worse. For some, it may be linked not only to the feelings they have to deal with, but also to the budget and spending that Christmas demands. Did you know that supermarkets make 90% of their income during the Christmas season? That explains why 68% of respondents said they feel financially strained and are barely making ends meet.

It's also not the happiest time for older people – British statisticians estimate that nearly 8% of the UK population spend their Christmas alone. While many people believe that Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year, it is very hard for seniors, especially the lonely ones. The memories of previous holidays may flood back, leaving them feeling blue and depressed. At least 55% reported recalling happier times in the past, which contrasts with the present. Not being able to spend Christmas with loved ones, which used to be the most fabulous night, is a dealbreaker for some older people, leading them to spend it alone.

But what can we do to avoid the "holiday blues" from consuming us? If you're feeling low, give yourself credit and focus on the ways of taking care of yourself and your mental health. Curling up under a blanket and binge-watching your favourite series, alternating between sleeping and eating, writing in a journal or listening to music.

Recognise what you need to survive this moment. And remember – in reality, there is no such thing as a perfect Christmas. However, be careful not to disregard your symptoms, especially if they persist for a long time. If the holiday season passes and you're still feeling depressed or anxious, talk to someone. Whether it's a psychologist, a friend or a colleague, never underestimate the importance of your well-being.

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GLOSSARY

alternate – switch between two things

curl up – to sit or lie with your arms and legs close to your body

dealbreaker – an issue that prevents you from reaching an agreement

exacerbate – make something worse

persist – keep going; not give up

strained – tense; not relaxed

void – emptiness



Merry Christmas – Women's Invisible Labour Lies Under the Tree

BY ZOFIA JÓZWIK



Let's picture a scene – an ordinary Christmas Eve morning. You wake up, smell the familiar aroma of gingerbread in the air, and an already decorated Christmas tree is waiting for presents to be placed underneath. You hear someone in the kitchen, nervously concocting something on the stove. I'm sure most of us are picturing our mothers right now, and it's not a coincidence. And I'm not talking about some Freudian reference.

For a long time in history, women were pictured as the caretakers of their children and home. Their job was to prepare meals, keep everything clean, and keep everyone happy while their husbands worked to provide for the family. After years of feminist movements, social progress, and change, we might think this model is extinct. Women now have a choice: whether to pursue a career, build a family, or do both. Unfortunately, this is only theoretical and does not reflect the current situation.

Due to stereotypes spanning several generations of women being homemakers, it is ingrained in society and often perceived as a norm that in a heteronormative relationship, it is the woman's job to take care of the house and children. It is so normalised that when a man occasionally does something to help, it is seen as extra work on his part. Inequality in chores is a common social phenomenon, even though many families share the work evenly. We can't overlook the problem. The American Time Use Survey (ATUS) in 2019 showed that women reported spending 2.16 hours per day on household activities, while men reported spending only 1.39 hours.

The situation only gets worse when we look at it in the context of any holiday. The amount of unpaid labour women have to complete to make Christmas magical for everyone is even greater, often leading to stress and pressure. They are aware that if they don't take care of it, no one will, and the responsibility for making Christmas feel merry rests on their shoulders. A 2024 British YouGov study shows that women are significantly more stressed about too many tasks (28% of women, 18% of men) and the costs of Christmas preparation (43% of women, 37% of men). What's interesting is that, from different categories of stressors, men excel only in worrying about too much alcohol on offer (11% of men, 9% of women). It is disheartening when we think about it. This festive and celebratory time is being upheld by the one person who can't even experience it fully since they are basically working two full-time jobs, and one of them doesn't even pay.

It also involves soothing tensions, mediating conflicts, and preemptively addressing others' needs to protect the tranquil Christmas atmosphere. It is all included in the term "kin-keeping". A kin-keeper is essentially a person (usually a woman) who manages all those little things that keep family and friends connected. It is a form of emotional labour performed both out of a sense of obligation and out of emotional attachment.

We can wonder why all those harmful gender roles and social constructs remain so prevalent in present times. But it is hard for something to disappear when all the media and pop culture preserve it so well. We see it through the iconic duo of Mr and Mrs Santa, and in Christmas advertisements, where it's the woman who cooks and prepares everything. We even hear it in most of the classic Christmas songs. Is all that Mariah Carey really wants for Christmas a man?

What I wrote about is just a scrap of a larger problem concerning gender roles in general. Obviously, it is not something that we can change quickly. It is rooted in hundreds of years of history and would probably take just as long to fade entirely. What we can do is raise our voices, educate ourselves and others and not ignore any of its manifestations. And coming back to Christmas, this year, if you see any of your loved ones struggling and overwhelmed by tasks, please help them because to create real Christmas magic, we all must add a pinch of our own.



Sources:

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GLOSSARY

- concoct** – to invent something by mixing different ideas or things
- disheartening** – making you feel discouraged or sad
- excel** – to be very good at something
- extinct** – no longer existing
- ingrained** – deeply fixed and difficult to change
- preemptively** – before others can act, especially to stop a problem
- prevalent** – common or widespread
- pursue** – to try hard to achieve something
- scrap** – a small piece of something
- soothe** – to calm or comfort someone
- span** – to continue for a particular length of time
- tranquil** – calm, quiet, and peaceful

Christmas Among Marginalised Social Groups

BY ALICJA CAPAŁA

"My Christmas is not like yours"

Most of the people we know spend Christmas with their family, surrounded by extra love and a caring atmosphere. This specific time is often perceived as a chance to relax from everyday stress, and children, especially, look forward to receiving the gifts they asked Santa for. But it's easy to forget those who lack those privileges, and their Christmas is entirely different from what most people know.

Loneliness During Christmas

Some people have no one to celebrate Christmas with (not by choice, for the most part), and for them it's an especially lonely time. Loneliness during Christmas feels heavier than on ordinary days, because the whole world seems focused on togetherness. Some of them still buy a Christmas tree and prepare traditional food. Others ignore the holiday entirely, treating it like any other day, because nothing really changes for them. Often, this time can bring back sad memories from the past, for example, spending Christmas with their parents (who are no longer alive or with whom they have broken off contact for various reasons, like domestic violence or other toxic behaviours).

Families Facing Poverty

Most of us don't have to worry about how to afford Christmas dinner. Still, many families struggle to make ends meet, so parents in those families don't even hope to buy presents for their children or prepare festive food for the Christmas table. Some parents in this situation are even willing to risk prosecution just to steal food or money and show their children what the average family can have for this occasion (by giving gifts or presenting a full-course meal). However, there's hope that they will instead seek help from different organisations or foundations (that offer support to those in need) rather than risking ending Christmas with a criminal record, which could bring more problems in the future.

To add to this topic of low-income families, it's also important to mention the situation of children in such families, who see Christmas as a reminder of what they cannot have rather than a joyful celebration.

When Christmas Becomes an Illusion of Peace

For many children affected by domestic violence, Christmas can feel like a temporary pause in chaos – a short moment when they hope their parents will behave differently. Some parents try to maintain an illusion of normality during the holidays, acting as if nothing is wrong during the rest of the year. This contrast can harm children even more (in addition to the psychological harm already caused by daily violence), because the temporary calm during Christmas makes them believe things might finally change – until the violence returns as soon as the holiday ends (or even a few hours into Christmas celebration), which shatters any fragile hope the child holds onto.

Inmates and Christmas Behind Bars

Another marginalised group often forgotten during Christmas are people who are serving prison sentences. They cannot simply return home for the holidays, and many of them have no one outside who would send a letter or even a small holiday package. For these inmates, Christmas often becomes a painful reminder of isolation, as they spend this time in the same routine environment, trying to cope with the lack of connection that most people take for granted.

Final Thoughts

Christmas is often portrayed as a season of joy, warmth, and togetherness, but not everyone experiences it this way. For many people, this time highlights loneliness, poverty, violence, or separation rather than comfort. Remembering those whose holidays look different helps us see Christmas with more empathy and reminds us that kindness and awareness matter just as much as celebration. In the end, understanding these different realities is the first step towards creating a more compassionate holiday season for everyone.



A woman with long, dark hair is shown in profile, looking down at a lit candle in a glass holder. The candle is surrounded by colorful, out-of-focus lights, likely from a Christmas tree, creating a warm and intimate atmosphere. The background is dark, making the lights stand out.

GLOSSARY

compassionate – kind and caring about other people's problems

to highlight – show or point out something important

to hold onto – keep something and does not let it go

inmate – someone who is in prison or jail

prosecution – when someone is officially charged with a crime

reminder – something that makes you remember something

shatter – destroy (also about hope or feelings)

togetherness – being close to other people

Christmas on Display

Anthropologists sometimes compare modern festive spending trends to traditional potlatch ceremonies of the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast of Canada and the US. In a potlatch, a host family gained prestige by giving away or destroying large quantities of valuable items, such as furs, clothing, jewellery, and canoes – showing generosity, but mainly proving that they could afford it.

Although Christmas occurs in a very different cultural and economic context, it has a touch of potlatch about it, as the underlying logic seems remarkably similar. Expensive decorations, such as designer ornaments, candles, or luxury Advent calendars, are sometimes bought for personal pleasure, but more often they serve as indicators of status and prosperity. Simply put, people buy things that show money.

The other day, while I was out shopping for Christmas decorations, I found a minimalist, modern-looking nativity scene made by Alessi. Its design and quality were excellent – it was made of fine, hand-decorated china. The great disadvantage, however, was the price.

The basic, relatively small set, which includes the grotto, the Holy Family, the ox, and the donkey cost over 500 zł. If you add figures of the comet, the angel, and the camel with three humps (one for each of the Magi), the cost rockets to around 800 zł. Each extra figure costs between 90 and 250 zł. Needless to say, Alessi's nativity scene is one of the more expensive Christmas decor items available in Poland, often bought for conspicuous consumption.

Alessi's nativity scene may bring genuine aesthetic pleasure, yet it also encourages you to buy it to show your place in the social hierarchy. In that way, the modern holiday season, with its shining displays and ever-rising price tags, echoes the spirit of the potlatch more than we'd like to admit.

AT

GLOSSARY

conspicuous consumption – buying expensive things to show off wealth or status

grotto – a small cave or cave-like structure

Indigenous peoples – the original inhabitants of a region



REVIEWS

BY JAN WOLICKI

Atomic habits

New year, new me. A fresh start. You have gained some insight into how habits work, and you know they are not so easy to establish. Especially if we try to change our lives around on the first of January just because it is a tradition. We can change, and we can better ourselves – that is true, and I won't deny it. But the process isn't as simple as it may seem. It often requires more work and discipline (which is sometimes better than motivation).

James Clear (the author of *Atomic Habits*) may help you a bit with your endeavour to implement change. In his book, he explains how our minds tend to be lazy and how the habits that shape our lives are formed. He also gives us step-by-step instructions for creating them – either developing new ones or replacing the old ones. The most important lesson of this book (in my opinion) is that big change comes from small steps. And remember it on the 31st of December, as you make plans for the year ahead. Maybe the first change is learning how to do it.

***Klaus* (2019)**

Two years ago, I encouraged you to watch an animated film. Some say these aren't real movies. I agree to disagree. They often bring much more than we might expect, even compared to a star-studded production. Take, for example, *Mysterious Mr Fox*, *WALL-E*, or *Corpse Bride*; all of them brought so much emotion and reflection. Another one is Sergio Pablos's film *Klaus*. When it comes to Christmas films, it is a bottomless pit. There is an incalculable number of holiday movies, and that number grows every year, with even more animated ones. It's like a plague. Most are based on clichés so familiar that they just turn us off. But there are a few pearls in the sea of platitudes. And every now and then, something breaks through the forest of clichés and cheesiness. *Klaus* is such a pearl.

The film tells us a story of an unconventional friendship between a mailman and a sad man from the forest (*Klaus*). Neither of their stories is the happiest, but they lead to some interesting phenomena that bring joy. However, the movie doesn't show us simply how to do it, nor that it is easy. It shows the cost and that those who give often have to fight many battles themselves. I won't spoil the fun by revealing too much, but whenever you have a moment on a winter evening with a cup of hot chocolate or tea and want to watch something that will bring a bit of hope, it's a perfect choice. Enjoy.

WISE & WITTY

JOKES

- *What do you get if you cross a snowman and a dog?*
• *Frost-bite.*
- *What do gingerbread men use when they break their legs?*
• *Candy canes.*
- *What do you call an old snowman?*
• *Water.*
- *What does Santa suffer from if he gets stuck in a chimney?*
• *Claus-trophobia!*
- *What do you call an obnoxious reindeer?*
• *Rude-olph.*

IDIOMS

- *Like turkeys voting for Christmas*
Choosing something that clearly goes against your own interests.
- *It's the thought that counts*
The intention behind an action matters more than its material value.
- *Good things come in small packages.*
A gift doesn't need to be big to be valuable and meaningful.
- *Ring in the New Year*
Celebrate the start of the new year.
- *Start the year off on the right foot*
Begin the new year positively.
- *Turn over a new leaf*
Make a fresh start.
- *Out with the old, in with the new*
Let go of old habits, things, or ideas and welcome new ones.

PROVERBS

- *Christmas comes but once a year*
Christmas is an annual event, so enjoy yourself to the fullest.
- *The best gifts come from the heart, not the store*
Actual value lies in thoughtfulness, not in size or money.
- *A new broom sweeps clean*
A new start brings change.
- *What the new year brings, the old year has sown*
Current results are the consequences of past actions.



EXERCISES

Exercise 1.

Fill in the missing idiom or proverb in each sentence.

1. Stop complaining about the present – remember, _____.
2. Supporting his candidacy is like _____ – it makes no sense at all.
3. _____, so we try to make the most of it.
4. Let's _____ the New Year with something joyful – fireworks perhaps?
5. She's determined to _____ by eating healthier and exercising.
6. On 1 January, most people try to _____ – new habits, new routines, new goals.
7. It's time to throw out old clothes and paperwork – _____!

Exercise 2.

Complete the text with the most appropriate words from the vocabulary list.

commemorate, embrace, distress, intermingle, hardship, ruminate, soothe, sustain, togetherness, ingrained, exacerbate, void

Every December, people across the world observe Christmas by following traditions so deeply _____ (1) in their culture that it survives even the busiest modern lifestyle. As Christmas approaches, feelings of warmth and _____ (2) often _____ (3) with moments of worry, particularly for those who associate the season with past _____ (4). Many people _____ (5) over unresolved tensions or family expectations, which can _____ (6) the feelings of _____ (7) rather than relieve them.

Yet the season also offers opportunities to _____ (8) practices that can _____ (9) a sense of connection: trimming the Christmas tree, preparing meals, and sharing the Christmas wafer to _____ (10) the birth of Jesus. For many, such rituals help _____ (11) the emotional _____ (12) that sometimes opens between the year that is ending and the one that is just beginning.

Exercise 3.

Choose the best word to complete each sentence.

1. Many people feel a strong sense of _____ during Christmas as families and friends gather in one place.
A. prosecution B. togetherness C. pointlessness
2. The uncertainty of whether Santa will bring presents can easily _____ children's stress.
A. exacerbate B. nurture C. reinforce
3. Spending every Christmas together helps the family to _____ the bonds they all cherish.
A. embrace B. pursue C. sustain
4. Although the year had been full of _____, the family chose to focus on the small victories they had won together.
A. hardship B. social anxiety C. relatedness
5. The tradition of making New Year's resolutions helps some people _____ the upcoming year with optimism.
A. embrace B. displace C. disprove
6. Young Tim's hopes for a peaceful holiday were completely _____ when his parents started arguing.
A. shaken off B. shattered C. soothed
7. The festive season encourages people to be _____ by donating money or volunteering to help those in need.
A. mindful B. cherished C. charitable

1.b; 2.a; 3.c; 4.a; 5.a; 6.b; 7.c

Exercise 3.

8. embrace; 9. sustain; 10. commemorate; 11. soothe; 12. void

ruminate; 6. exacerbate; 7. distress;

1. ingrained; 2. togetherness; 3. intermingle; 4. hardship; 5.

Exercise 2.

7. out with the old, in with the new

6. turn over a new leaf

5. start the year off on the right foot

4. ring in

3. Christmas comes but once a year

2. turkey's visiting for Christmas

1. it's the thought that counts; the best gifts come from the heart, not the store; good things come in small packages.

Exercise 1.

key



Crossword Puzzle



ACROSS

- 3. to mix or blend together
- 5. common or widespread
- 6. loved and valued very much
- 9. quiet, and peaceful
- 10. doing something in a similar way over time
- 11. something that causes difficulty or suffering
- 16. happening soon; approaching
- 18. to think carefully and for a long time about something
- 21. a small cave
- 24. to attract or tempt someone
- 25. the longest or shortest day
- 26. not defeated
- 27. kingdom
- 28. the lack of meaning or purpose
- 29. tense: not relaxed

DOWN

1. a continued effort to do or achieve something even when it's difficult
2. to invent something by mixing different ideas or things
4. to take care of and help something grow
6. kind and generous, especially by helping people in need
7. making you feel discouraged or sad
8. to be very good at something
12. deeply fixed and difficult to change
13. to show that something is not true
14. kind and caring about other people's problems
15. to be careful not to forget about something
17. to calm or comfort someone
19. being close to other people
20. of consumption of expensive things to show off wealth or status
22. to try to achieve a particular aim
23. plentiful

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

HOW TO MAINTAIN YOUR NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION

ADITHYA CHAKRAVARTHY

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LINGUISTIC TIDBITS

wish

In English, we often say:

"I wish you a Happy New Year!" which is natural and correct. However, if you say:

"I wish you will have a Happy New Year." That's incorrect.

Why?

After "wish", we never use "will" in present or future sentences.

"Wish" introduces an unreal or hypothetical situation, so we use the present tense to refer to the future:

Correct: "I wish you a Happy New Year" (with a noun) or in a verb form: "I wish you had a great year ahead" (past tense for an unreal or polite wish).

Remember, when talking about the future, "wish" doesn't go with "will".

Getting up in the morning to work out on January second is quite easy, but why does it become more challenging as the year goes on? In this engaging presentation, Adithya explores the science behind motivation.

Did you know that ...

some Christmas and pre-Christmas customs have already taken on a global character? After the famous Coca-Cola advertising campaign of the 1930s, Santa Claus, his image and influence on the mass imagination, went beyond the boundaries of Christian culture. Santa Claus is the Anglicised form of the Dutch Sante Klaas, a figure from the customs of the Dutch community of New Amsterdam on Manhattan. New Amsterdam became New York—Sante Klaas lost his crozier and bishop's robes and was transformed into a dwarf in a red suit trimmed with white fur, wearing a loosely designed red cap instead of a mitre. Little remained in the collective consciousness from the legends and stories of Saint Nicholas, the bishop of Myra. But Santa became a prominent figure in often massive advertising campaigns, frequently with global reach. In Japan, as Santa Kurosu or Santa-san, he became the hero of anime films and the recipient of letters from children asking for gifts.

BT

BT

**BIG CHANGES
COME FROM
SMALL STEPS.
WHAT WAS YOUR
SMALL STEP
TODAY?**



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