

Sacred Observances

Carolyn Dorrance
President, Institute of World Culture



As Spring warmth stirs feelings of birth and beauty, many will join in celebrations of sacred holy days such as Easter, Passover, Ramanavami, Hanuman Jayanti, the Buddhist Flower Festival and in early May, Buddha Purnima. Why do so many religious holidays occur in the months following the Spring equinox when Nature offers evidence of birth and resurrection, and the storms of winter have subsided? How can we understand and make use of this cycle of rebirth and beauty when news of so much grim chaos fills our media and marks the era we live in?

Religious observances might remind us of the self-interested destruction inflicted by one group on another. The Pharaoh of Egypt is seen as the villain in the Passover story; the Romans and Pharisees stand accused of crucifying a spiritual leader in the prime of his teaching cycle. The demonic forces of Mara intensely attack Siddhartha as he seeks enlightenment through meditation under the Bo tree. In the Indian epic, The Ramayana, Sri Hanuman, the brave and loyal servant, must destroy the demon Ahiravana to rescue Rama's consort Sita and restore Lakshmana to life so that righteous rule can be restored on earth. This

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1407 Chapala Street, Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 966-3961

focus on the villainy of some, usually those in positions of established authority, can reinforce a sense of martyrdom and special redemption in those faithful to a particular religious narrative. Their sacred story could become an accusation of us against them, good against evil, and the saved against the damned.

Is there not a more universal message that these stories share? Could we not find at the core of these narratives a message of liberation and triumph reflected in the aspirations of mankind and mirrored in the fresh blossoms of the natural world? The liberation is from the destructive forces that work within us as well as in social conflict. The triumph is in the conquest of these forces through right mindfulness and ethical commitment. The possibility of this conquest over that, which would destroy our potential for renewal, growth and service, is exemplified in the sacrifice and suffering of heroic leaders such as Moses, Jesus, Rama, Buddha and Mohammed. Their triumph over selfishness, fear and hypocrisy includes a liberation from any desire for revenge fed by the seeming injustices inflicted upon them and their followers. In the current climate of sectarian violence, national chauvinism and gratuitous destruction of the human imagination, thoughtful but joyous celebration of sacred holidays in a spirit of universal brotherhood and sisterhood might draw us closer to the rebirth of hope and inspiration that this Spring season represents and reflects. Let us pay tribute to all those who are at work in a chaotic world exemplifying hope and teaching others the possibility of *experiencing liberation and triumph over adversity*.

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