

# Traditions behind holiday gifts

The holiday season is a time to celebrate with friends and family. Several holidays are celebrated in this relatively short time period, making this one of the most festive times of the year.

Many holiday celebrations focus on the exchange of presents, which may be exchanged with relatives, friends and even coworkers. But are you familiar with the origins of exchanging gifts?

Gift exchanges trace their origins to both religious and secular traditions, each of which has helped shape the holidays into what they are today.

## Christmas

People exchange gifts on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day all over the world. For Christians, Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, who Christians believe was a gift from the Creator.

From a religious standpoint, gifting others around Christmastime can be traced back to the stories of the Three Kings (also referred to as the "Three Wise Men") who visited Jesus after his birth. Frankincense, a fragrance

involved in worship; gold; and myrrh, an incense associated with funerals, was presented.

These gifts symbolized worship in Christ, that He would be the King of Kings, and that suffering and death would come to Him.

Another giver of gifts is part of many Christmas celebrations. St. Nicholas, a fourth century saint, is a beloved figure across the globe who has a reputation for giving gifts in secret and helping the needy. The figure of "Santa Claus" is based on St. Nicholas, and the blending of the two has evolved as history has mixed with folklore and personal traditions.

## Hanukkah

Hanukkah is an eight-day Jewish celebration that commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem. The word "hanukkah" actually means "dedication" in Hebrew.

The Jews, including Judah Maccabee, helped drive the Syrians out of Jerusalem. In one of Judaism's most central texts, Maccabee and others witnessed a miracle at the temple. Even though there was only enough oil to keep a menorah's candles burning for

one day, the flames continued for eight nights.

Traditionally, gelt, or money, was given as a Hanukkah gift. Many Hanukkah gift givers aim to give gifts that are thoughtful and sweet. Money is not exchanged as much today, with other gifts taking its place.

## Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is an American holiday that pays homage to traditions and cultural influences from Africa. The holiday was developed in 1966 by Maulana Ndabezitha Karenga. The focus of Kwanzaa is on family and the

harvest as well as certain principles, such as unity and faith.

Gifts make up one of the seven symbols of Kwanzaa celebrations. However, gift-sharing is not the central part of this special holiday. Gifts are symbolic of the labor and love of parents and the commitments made and kept by their children.

Gifts are exchanged in abundance this time of year. The traditions behind the giving of presents is far-reaching and based in religious, secular and cultural traditions.



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