

Celebrating our Birthdays in the Unification Church

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When I joined in the late 1970s, we did not celebrate our birthdays. I don't know how official this was, but I remember being told a) we didn't celebrate our birthdays for the first 3 years, b) we only ever celebrated our spiritual birthdays or c) our blessing date became our new spiritual birthday, and the only one we celebrated. Anyway, I had the general idea that on my physical birthday, I should fast (as one Oakland brother did) or do something to apologize to God for my fallen birth.

If anyone remembers what the deal was on this, please chime in.

This doesn't mean any of it was official church doctrine. There were some rather interesting variations in how we practiced and what we believed. But back to birthdays.

Of course, birthdays on MFT were pretty much like any other day. Lean forward to make yourself run, keep busy to stay awake, try to make your goal. Watch out for the cops. Avoid the temptation to fall asleep in a park somewhere.

I remember one conversation on an MFT team about how we used to celebrate birthdays. Breakfast in bed, cake, parties, presents, etc. A wide-eyed sister said "In Sweden, for your birthday, maybe they give you a box of raisins!"

Birthdays were a little harder to avoid when you were in a church center. By avoid, here I mean get through the day without feeling sorry for yourself. Of course, I tried to offer it to God, but dang, it didn't feel good.

But there I was in New York, at 43rd street headquarters, a 'temporary' refugee from my IOWC team, there to see if I could get my fiance not to leave the church. I was taking care of Camp Happy Lake upstate and came into New York once a week or so to turn in receipts and check in.

And it happened that the day I usually came into town was my birthday. Which I could ignore easily enough, But the bookkeeper, Cathy Williams, had the same birthday as me. We had discovered this when she entered my info in the books. So I went to see her in her office, and there is her desk all covered in cards, balloons, etc. She gushes happily about all the stuff people gave her and what a wonderful day she was having.

I ulped and gulped internally and gave her my receipts. Didn't say anything. When I was done, I moped downstairs. As I was walking past the reception desk, planning to walk down the street and commune with the down and out, the phone rang. The brother on duty said "Sam, it's for you."

"Oh my god! I'm so glad you didn't leave yet. It's your birthday too! I'm so sorry, I totally forgot!"

"Mngrd...hem....s'ok."

"No it's not! I'm taking you to lunch. Don't you dare leave!"

"Mnnmph...ok."

Well, she took me out to lunch and I managed to bring my spirit out of the lower depths of self-pity. But I could still have a good mope about it later. And many of my birthdays in the early days were like that, a skate around feeling truly awful.

If I knew then what I know now (haha), perhaps I would have tried to plunge into my feeling and ask God if he'd ever felt that way too. Go through the experience to have a deeper connection with God. Well, we do what we know how to do in the moment, and the path we're on is unavoidably messy at times.

I still struggle on birthdays. With the blessing, and second generation born with God's blessing and all, there's not the same pressure to deny myself. But there's still the whirlpool of emotion, what I'd like it to be, even when I know it can't be, wanting to be ok with how it is, but not knowing how to deal with the depth of feeling that comes up. And many times, I'm just trying to get through it. Hoping it will be over soon, and I can resume my 'normal' life.

So how were your experiences of birthdays in the early days? Or lately, for that matter.