



holidays
HOLY DAYS

by Eric Sirota



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The holidays are only holy if we make them so.

-Marianne Williamson

Nothing says holidays, like a cheese log.

-Ellen DeGeneres

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From the Perspective of Chanukah

I am the American dream personified. The essence of the self-made man. Most people think I am the most important Jewish holiday. I am not even in the Bible, only tucked into the Apocrypha like a deleted scene, yet look at me along-side these others no one has heard of: Shmini Atzeretz, Simchat Torah, T'Bish Vat. When was the last time you saw a Yom Kippur Hallmark card? Yom Kippur is about repentance and fasting. Call it a High Holiday all you want, but guilt and hunger don't sell.

I sell.

I started from the bottom. Drake started a child star. I started with nothing. Yet here I am: 8 days of Xbox games, of slow dancing with Geoffrey the Toys R Us giraffe. I am so popular Middle America Walmarts say *Happy Holidays* on Christmas because of me, while I ride the season like a race horse yelling *location location location* as Rosh Hashannah looks on longingly from Autumn. Sure, if I was a better man I might share the limelight with these holier days devoted to family and forgiveness, but this is capitalism. My value is in your hands, and every year you choose me, against all odds. I am not some feel-good Fourth of July.

*Yay! We're free from England!
We do t have to wear those fucking wigs anymore!*

My tale is one of right-wing Hebrews gaining victory to better oppress moderate Jews. But still, everyone loves me. I've got lunch boxes and shit! I don't need that pansy-ass Thanksgiving's McGraw-Hill textbook consultants to knit a quilt from my broken glass narrative. I succeed, without help. I don't need help. I was born on Christmas.

Jesus wasn't even born on Christmas.

So take it from me, Jewish High holidays, with your three hour liturgies and introspective world peace bullshit, Sukkot with your dated wishes for a plentiful harvest. What was your miracle, Pesach? Swarms of locusts? Stone tablets? I'm sure those just fly off the shelf. Oil was my miracle! That's that shit we go to war for. Halliburton doesn't hire mercenaries to capture unleavened bread. Your archaic rituals are fossils. I am the petroleum meniscus rising above them. Just watch my dreidel spin. Watch the winner snatch up the pot. And why shouldn't he?

He earned it.

Rosh Hashanah indulges in flagrant self-pity

You know that kid in sixth grade
with thick rimmed glasses who always wore strangely
adult-looking shirts and was probably named Ron
or something and he was perfectly nice but there was something
super sad about him so you never really looked forward
to seeing him?

I am the Ron of New Year's celebrations.

January 1 marks the day
that Americans
are most likely
to have sex
with multiple people
at the same time

On the Irish New Year
women sleep with mistletoe
under their pillows

Celebrants in China
dress as flamboyant dragons
and take to the streets in gallant parades

In Peru the men wrestle

In Scotland, they swing balls
of fire around their heads

But to celebrate me,
the Jews repent.
And sometimes visit graves.
They sometimes eat apples.
The especially wild ones
put honey on the apples.

And then the rabbi
reminds everyone
they might die

in a flood.

Yom Kippur addresses the Jewish People

Catholics are pansies. They don't have to deal with me. They do something wrong. They tell a priest. Priest tells them to say some shit. They say some shit. They're good.

For example:

Catholic: I'm a mass murderer.

Priest: Say some shit.

Catholic: Our Father whatever whatever

Priest: You're good

God: If the Priest says you're good, then fuck it, you're good.

Ya'll, though, not so lucky. You have to go through me and I'm like Judge Dred up in this bitch. Hurt your mom's feelings? Gotta apologize. Cheated on your girlfriend? Gotta apologize. Can't find her?

Who by water . . .

And I know what you're thinking:
haven't we been through enough?
Sure, you've had a pretty rough last few millennia. But you've also been eating bagels for like a thousand years longer than anyone else.

Yom Kippur actually means *a day without bagels*. If you screw up the fast, though, God probably won't do much. HaShem outsourced this one to Nana and Nana's still pissed you're dating that Goische blonde Christine Christianson from Rochester who loves you in sweater vests. All I'm sayin is, don't fuck with Grandma. She'll start talking about the Holocaust again.

And nobody cares that you're related to Harold Ramis.

Look, I know Christians have a really nice
God with a really great beard and fasting just means eating
fish on Fridays and you feel kind of out of place
around them because they're always talking about *heaven*
and *destiny* instead of *pogroms* and *clinical depression* and you envy
the luxury of being able to say *God take the wheel*
without picturing the biggest car crash ever.

I get that.

But this is your lot. Your God was angry
until He was absent. Your forefathers
chose this for you. Rejoice in that heritage.

Christmas writes a dream journal

An erasure after "Silent Night" by Franz Gruber

night
is bright.
Child,
Sleep in heaven

quake
from afar
hosts sing Alleluia,
the Savior is

Silent

New Year's Eve visits a support group

I am tired
of all this beginning.
I just want my voice
to evoke a memory

my scent to spurn nostalgia.
But I am an egg that only hatches
more eggs. I swear every time
that this year

will be different.
I promise my mother
I'll settle down but just as soon
as I say it, I am blacked-out,
amnesiac.

This year I woke-up to another
hotel room graveyard
of unmarked pill bottles,
carpeted with shredded
photographs,
a man on TV

lamenting a war
like he always is.
There was a clock-radio
blinking 12:00,
playing a song

I swear I've heard
a million times
but for the life of me
can't name.

Thanksgiving gets defensive about privilege

I don't understand
why the picket signs
crop up

like maize,
why they care
what a text book

does or doesn't say
about me. Let's just be
thankful for all that we have

These housebroken birds
and rivers of wine.
These warm blankets

and scorching ovens. Can't we just celebrate
all of this bounty without interruption
from so many questions?

April Fools' Day: Always Be Closing

You can achieve any dream

Your obstacles are of your own design

All you need is this

Never mind these numbers

Never mind what you think you see outside

Your windows are just mirrors

You are only deterred by your own hurt

Never mind that pain

It is only your pain telling you *no*

Listen instead to that joy

Revel in that affirmation

Know that I love you like a kind mirror

Listen to all that love

All that return

Are you too damaged to hear it?

Are you too broken to realize everything I have given you?

Everything you lost?

You can have it all back.

It's April.

The cold is dead.

You just have to do
this one thing
for me.

Patriots Day¹ Confronts the 4th of July

As if this nation began
when a bunch of fuck boys
in wigs played just the tip
with the Declaration of Independence.

Like those crown-worshipping
Limeys just let us go
because some slave-holding
pseudoscientist drank too much
water-logged tea and decided
that all people were equal that day.

Like we were anything other than a lynch-mob
of claustrophobic cowboys, hungry
to ride West, sick of being told
it was rude to small pox the Natives
before crumpets.

There was no rainbow flag
of fireworks, no mid-day parade
showcasing the accomplishments
of the local little league team.

The birth of this Nation
was a back-road cesarean, a cleansing.
I am not proud of everything
I have done, but it is high time
we acknowledge that this glorious
nation's beginnings can only be remembered
by its dead.

¹ One of the lesser known holidays in this book, Patriots' Day is a state holiday celebrated in Massachusetts, Wisconsin and Maine commemorating the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the first battles of the Revolutionary War. Also, Patriots' Day is an asshole.

The 4th of July Responds

There is a difference
between a lie

and a myth.
A lie seeks to cover

the past, while a myth
seeks to elucidate the future.

Read harshly, I am a lie -
that America began

in celebration.
That "all men are created equal"

was written to extend to a class
of beyond its authors.

But I prefer to think
of myself as a myth

That somewhere there is room
for everyone under even
a cataclysmic sky.

Presidents' Day tries to justify dressing up as a wizard

1.

They always called George Washington “The Wizard of Our Independence”
Probably because he was always wearing those weird clothes
and that pointy hat
and he had that long white beard
that implicitly told everyone:

*don't worry. I'll only stay in office for two terms.
I'm not some tax thirsty monarch
I'm just a lonely old wizard
with my wizard hat and my wizard beard
and my magic horse and my weird clothes.*

*That's what I always wear
because I'm a
motherfucking wizard.*

2.

As any student of American history knows
there are eight primary types of wizards:

- a. Adepts
- b. Spiritualists
- c. Druids
- d. Bards
- e. Mystics
- f. Witches
- g. Shamans
- h. Thaumturgists

America's presidents, heroes that they are, tend to be adepts, healers, spiritualists and thamuturgists.

We have never had a witch president, though Lyndon Johnson is said to have been a son of a witch.

John Adams was a druid, as is made obvious by his druid robe.

John Quincy Adams, ironically, was an adept. Just look at his shoes. Classic adept.

Jefferson was a shaman.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy and William Jefferson Clinton, were, of course, both spiritualists, as evidence by their especially delicate treatment of forest creatures and other gentler types. President Clinton was often seen smoking on his wizard pipe to gain enlightenment, as is typical of spiritualist leaders.

3.

Washington is difficult to classify. He may have been a bard, as indicated by his purple Wizard quill. Though given his passion for agriculture, he was most likely an adept.

Just look at any portrait of him on his fields, white fluffy wizard plants healthy and proliferating in the background.

And those tiny blotches of dark paint hovering over the wizard plants? Those must be the elves.

Every wizard needs elves.

Surprise, surprise. Halloween is shitfaced again.

I sh-sh-sh stilllllllllllll m-mourn
er'ywon weev loast.
Why elth wuld I d rin k
untiiill all i kin du
is pertend
that dea-th jus t dresses
the liffig en sheets?

Arbor Day bemoans its lack of sexual prowess

*I am gonna get so laid
this Arbor Day
-no one ever.*

I celebrate trees.

People don't fuck to trees.

They fuck to just about everything else:

The New Year

Ghosts and goblins

Avoidance of Jewish genocide at the hands of the Persians

Independence from England

The birth of the Christian messiah

Pagan shit

Flag Day

People play all kinds of games on Flag Day.

No one keeps their marriage vibrant or bags a stranger
by dressing up like a tree.

People invent terms like

Happy boner

Drunk boner

Grief boner

Purim boner

There's no *tree boner*.

Why would there be?

Afterall, trees are just long
hard girthy rods that spill
seeds everywhere.

St. Patrick's Day Contemplates the Fallacy of Origins

I must make people nervous
because no one seems to know
exactly what I stand for
but any time I come around
everyone starts to drink uncontrollably

just like the villagers did
when St. Patrick arrived in Dublin after
he was just a shepherd, before Christ
sent him to the Coast

and he arrived at the village inn
and showed the patrons how the trinity
of a clover explained God and he held his walking stick
towards the moon and mumbled some unfamiliar sounds
in an unfamiliar voice and all the snakes crawled out
of hiding and left forever so he planted his
stick in the earth and it immediately
sprouted leaves.

No one knew where he came from but they drank
to him or maybe just to the ancient joy
he inspired.

I must make people nervous. Every time I show up they put on another culture's
costume and try to forget everything.

Or maybe it's not me. Maybe people
are just nervous anyway
and looking for any reason
to disappear into the reckless
mouth of a stranger.

Nobody loves you
Nobody loves you
Nobody loves you

Chocolate!!!!!!!!!!
Nobody loves you
Nobody loves you

Nobody loves you
Nobody loves you
Nobody loves you

Nobody loves you
Nobody loves you

Earth Day Shows Gratitude

They say *every day*
is Earth Day
But we all know
that's not true.
Most days are just
Monday, Tuesday . . .

Even with all the calls to arms
for this planet, most days are still just
forgot to sort the recycling,
had to crank the air conditioning,
was too tired to walk.

But that doesn't mean
I'm not brimming
with pride or that I take

for granted
that I was conceived
of humanity's will
to remind itself
to do better

that I was born from the seemingly
impossible connection
between flipping
a switch and melting
glaciers, between wrapping gifts
with newspaper and saving rare
birds, this nearly unfathomable

ability to empathize
with glowing monsters at the bottom
of an ocean, with a flying mass of
stone that doesn't truly breath.

Even if just for a day.
I don't need glitter
or fanfare, prayer shawls

or song. I just need a kernel
of effort.

I just need the world
to turn the lights off
when they leave.

Memorial Day has an Existential Crisis

i
was
conceived
through
force

please
never
need
me
again

A Portrait Commissioned in Celebration of Lincoln's Birthday, 2016, Speaks to the Actual Abraham Lincoln

Mr. President, you should thank me. I am all that is left of you,
and I look like the type of man who wins wars

Looking out over this country as Shiloh falls North. Gettysburg falls North.
The Union seizes Atlanta. The slaves are freed in the Territories and then across the South.

Look at this face: sobered by bloodshed but steadfast in victory—
That of a man who would spool his own veins to sow this nation whole,
Who had to be begged not to pick up the musket himself and gallop to Antietam.
Who can question your motives after one look at my weary but unrelenting jaw line?
These knowing eyes scream noble death like a crown of thorns.

Also, I have a killer fuckin' beard.
I'm like a Chasidic super hero,
a progressive rabbi with future powers.
And, what could make the smartest caveman ever
look even more gangster?
This hat.

This is how I have made the whole world see you.
A steadfast emancipator. A rock.
Half man. Half allegory. Half vampire killer.

Tired only because he donated his adrenaline to the greater good. The kind of guy
who saves the country and still makes the play.

Always stately.
And always with an awesome beard.

But there is so much I don't show. How you were always a soprano.
The pundits today would take to your cadence until you were addressing
Gettysburg in a pitch-altered sound bite.

I don't show why your eyes were truly so weary. How your boys Edward and Tad only saw
America when their ashes road your funeral train. How until the afternoon of your death you
were still conducting séances for them while Mary Todd mourned until she could only blink
at Jesus from the asylum.

But even before all of this, you were a house struggling to stand.

They called it *melancholia* at the time.

How even back in the Kentucky you would wake before the rooster after not sleeping at all.

How no purpose short of saving the world could get you out of bed.

How getting out of bed was ravery. How it was a bravery you could never be proud of.

How it was a bravery I can't help but hide.

What would your legacy be if the textbooks revealed that your

I am a mask? Did those four star generals aboard

your funeral train even notice that you had begun to decompose

in the mid-Ohio heat like you were anxious to disappear,

or had they already reduced you to me, unable to accept that

even your beard, while awesome,

would long be outlived

by mine?

epilogue

דיינא

(it would have been enough)

Day of Repentance

It's Yom Kippur, the Jewish day of repentance and forgiveness. We fast on Yom Kippur, which means we don't eat anything from sundown to sundown, though I make exceptions for Aquafresh and water. I'm sure there's something intelligent to say about all of this, about privilege, faith, opiates of the masses, self-flagellation, and historical memory. But right now, it's 3pm and I am fucking hungry.

My Nana guilt tripped me into going to services, but I hate them more than Jewish God hates everybody. She told me to marry a Rachel Goldstein. I told her I was in a serious relationship with a Palestinian gentleman named Ahmad, which knows isn't true because I'm never in a serious relationship. Meanwhile, in temple 300 Jews are engaged in prayer:

Barchu et Adonai homvorah.

Baruch Adonai homvorach la'olam va'ed.

Shalom Einstein Sandy Kolfax oy vey schmuck matzah Seinfeld

I don't think anyone believes what we're saying. Since the Holocaust, 60% of Jews identify as atheist, according to Wikipedia.

Moses rabbi Beastie Boys

The sermon is about struggling with Judaism's place in the modern world and what there is to do about it. I know I struggle with Judaism's place in my life, and I know what I'm going to do about it. I'm gonna fucking complain about it. I'm gonna piss off my parents and my grandpa and the guy in Roger's Park who does my dry cleaning.

Kosher hot dogs

I'm gonna act like a fucking 13-year-old for the rest of my life about going to Brandeis and wearing suits and Israel and interfaith marriage. I'm gonna say angry things to God, not like Christ on the cross or Abraham pleading for Sodom and Gomorrah, but like me whining right now.

Baruch atah

accusations of liberal media bias

are code for anti-Semitism

Drake Barbara Streisand

In December 2008, I visit the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, Israel bombs Gaza,

killing 700 civilians in 3 weeks. Maybe this is what causes the gulf between me and heritage to fluctuate between puddle and moat. Maybe it's the pressure against interfaith marriage, which smells like bigotry but tastes like loyalty. Or the pointless fasts. Or the suburban flight.

Or maybe, it's how every time I bow my head in prayer to a God I still believe in
my yarmulke falls to the floor.

Away

During the Holidays, when I'm away
from family, I pray to the light
of a blinking clock

imagine each flash
the face of an unknowable G-d

the space between them
the language of mystics.

It is always noon
or Midnight.

And if the sun of this house
should burn out, when it reignites
it will be noon or midnight again.

In the Midwest, there are only Jews
in a few places and all those places
are Chicago. I don't know much

about miracles or Hebrew.
But I know how home feels
what it means to believe in God

without caring if He exists
how forgiveness repeats itself
over and over again

like a good re-run
and isn't that the best
definition of *family*?

Isn't that the pine tar that preserves
the dock of this otherwise
splintering heritage?

Maybe God created holidays
just to make sure we still

miss people who aren't buried.

I went to temple 5 times this year
the most I've been
since I was a boy.

That is to say, I went to five
funerals this year. I shovel
two scoops

in the grave then head south -
put miles between myself and anyone
I've ever prayed for.

I miss them most on holidays.
Tell myself they're just away
like I am.

I can't swallow their names.
I pretend to miss them
like home.

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