

How Do You Draw Your Stars?

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

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A nine-pointed star piñata. Source: Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain). Posted by user JEDIKNIGHT1970

I once shared an intensive months-long training with a peer group, and as our time of learning and working together was drawing to a close, we decided to plan how we would mark the occasion. We knew we'd like some sort of celebration – in some style.

In addition to a get-together outside of the work and learning environment, we decided we needed some outdoor activities. And, in a planning conversation, we floated the idea of having a piñata. One of the peers, who happened to be into crafts, offered to make the piñata himself, and he wanted to make it as traditional as possible. Since he knew about my heritage, he asked me what the most traditional shape might be.

Now, it's important to note that it's quite common in Mexico for piñatas to be of just about any shape that might appeal to any personal taste. They range from animal shapes, to superheroes, to cartoon characters. A simple walk through any store or market that caters to parties will have anything from the Little Mermaid, to Spiderman, to SpongeBob Square-pants, and even individual cars, from the movie *Cars*.

But a traditional motif, especially around the Christmas season, what might be called a “star of Bethlehem” – these are very popular during the *posadas* that happen around this time of year. So, in response to my peer's question, I answered that a “star-shape” would offer that traditional vibe that he was looking for.

Now, when I say “star-shape”, I was imagining the rather ornate three-dimensional “stars” that are typically made with a round base – either a clay pot, or a papier-mâché globe – and peaks made with cardboard cones, each one richly decorated in coloured paper and foil, as well as streaming tassels at the end of each point. Once I had offered this counsel, I quickly forgot about the conversation, as our end-of-program celebration was still a while away.

When the celebration finally came around, my peer proudly brought out his handmade piñata... it was a flat five-pointed star, just thick enough to contain a respectable amount of candies and goodies. I was intrigued by the design, and asked him what had inspired him to choose that particular shape. My peer looked surprised... “Why, Rod – it’s what *you* suggested!”

It was my turn to be surprised – I had no recollection of recommending that shape. To be clear, this design would be perfectly appropriate in any birthday party or celebration – I simply could not imagine having suggested that particular figure... “I did?” I asked, “When did I do that?”

“I asked you what shape is traditional,” he reminded me, “and you said ‘star’... so I made a star”.

My memory came back – yes, I *had* said “star”! And that’s *exactly* what he crafted. It just never occurred to me that he would conceive of a star-shaped piñata that looked like... that kind of star. I had been so used to the ornate Mexican star-of-Bethlehem patterns, that a flat five-point star had *never* entered my imagination as an example of a “star”-shaped piñata! And yet, his interpretation of my instruction was a perfectly reasonable rendering of what I had recommended.

Our celebration went along fine. We hung up the piñata, we wacked the piñata, we cracked piñata, we collected as many candies as we could, and then hung out, happy that our learning work had been completed.

But I was struck by how divergent our own understandings of the same concept had been. I was also surprised by how certain I had been of my own clarity in my instructions, and how I had never anticipated these same instructions to be interpreted in such an unexpected way. It was a perfectly fine result – just... different from what I had envisioned.

As many of us begin decorating our spaces with holiday imagery, the star motif takes hold around our homes, our media, and the stores that offer a variety of decorating options. And surely enough, the stars on offer are quite diverse – the differences among them range from the number of points, to the colours, materials, sizes, and where they belong on our spaces. Some are flat, and some take up more space. Some are soft, and some are... riskier to handle. And of course, there are always the *real* stars in the sky, which seldom look the way we represent them, and would be... impractical to reproduce with the same materials in our decorations (being that household hydrogen is hard to come by, and much more difficult to fuse into helium at home)!

And even when we agree on the kind of star we're talking about – say, a flat, five-point star – it is quite possible to see many ranges of diversity in them. They could be drawn, painted, cut-out, folded in origami, textured, or glittery. And *even* if we're specifically talking about drawing these stars, each of us can bring a level of diversity to it.

If you think you already know someone really well, and are wondering what else you could possibly learn about them, you might ask them: “*How do you draw your stars?*” You might be surprised. Chances are that, when you draw a five-point star, you've gotten used to starting at a particular point... but maybe the people you thought you knew use a different starting point!

Some people might start at the top point, while others use the bottom left, the bottom right, or maybe one of the two “arms” at the sides. We

are so used to doing it *our* way, that it might not have crossed our minds that people we know may do it in an entirely different way.

And so it is with this holiday season. Each of us will have an idea of what we expect at this time of year, with traditions that let us know that the holidays have “happened”. For some of us, the holidays mean Christmas, along with a specific set of stories, music, food, decorations, and people we hope to see. Among us, there are folks for whom the holy day and holy night that come with the winter solstice might be what the holidays are really about. Some among us or near us might have recently celebrated Channukkah for eight days. For others, the holiday time might be about cozying up during long winter nights, or maybe picking up extra shifts and even getting paid time-and-a-half for working on days that other people are able to take off from work. All these realities can coexist.

For some folks among us, the holidays can be difficult. They may be lonely times, or stressful times, or involve interacting with more people than is comfortable, or with whom things may be... complicated. These can be times when celebration comes along with extra work, or with extra expenses that we may not be prepared for. These realities can coexist.

Very often, the joys and sorrows of the holidays can converge, being both the best and the most difficult times of the year. These realities can coexist.

My friends, at this time of the year, we are called to honour a diversity of holiday experiences. To be better able to see what that experience means to each of us, and those next to us.

My friends, may we get to know what these experiences are in our diverse communities.

My friends, may we be able to see how our neighbours draw their stars.

So may it be,
In Solidarity and faith,

Amen

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Suggested Hymns:

Opening Hymn #247 O Little Town of Bethlehem

Words: Phillips Brooks, 1835-1893, alt.

Music: English melody, harmony by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872-1958, used by perm. of Oxford University Press

FOREST GREEN

Hymn #1051 We Are... (For Each Child That's Born)

~)-| Words & music: Ysaïe M. Barnwell, 1946- , © 1991 Barnwell's Notes Publishing (BMI). Used by permission.

Closing Hymn #1059 May Your Life Be As Song

~)-| Words: Jim Scott, 1946 -

Music: Yuri Zaritsky