

**March 11<sup>th</sup> Peer-to-Peer Conversation Timed Script**  
**“It’s a Celebration! Sharing Traditions of How Women Celebrate”**  
**In Commemoration of International Women’s Day**

**An Overview of, and Introduction to Celebrations**

I just want to take a few minutes to set the “celebratory stage” (so to speak) for our small group conversations by first providing a general overview of what, where, how, why and whom we celebrate. What follows is, of course, just a taste of the rich diversity that exists in the world of celebrations. As I review the various facets of these festivities, try to picture the celebrations in your own life, especially the role of women in these celebrations, and how they fit into the parameters I will cover.

Celebrations are arguably a human universal and we have yet to record a culture that does not celebrate at least in some way. But *what* is celebrated varies tremendously from place to place, time to time, and culture to culture.

People around the world celebrate various aspects of the yearly cycle and its seasons, from new years, to planting and harvesting times, and the solstices, to



mention just a few.

It is also very common to celebrate key milestones in

our individual lives, such as birth and naming (and subsequent birthdays), coming of age, fertility and pregnancy, marriage (and anniversaries), and even death. Indeed it is very common for celebrations

to remember and pay tribute to those who have passed away.



Many other celebrations have a religious focus, honouring gods or marking special days in the religious calendar.

Other celebrations

commemorate significant historical events, such as gaining independence, or the end of slavery, for example. Finally, there are other festivities that celebrate belonging to a particular group – such as International Women’s Day!



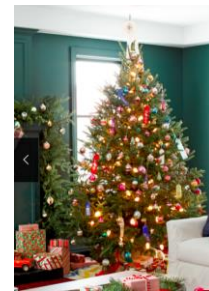
So, **Where** do celebrations take place? Well, pretty much anywhere – on land, sea, and even in the air. Some small celebrations take place in the home, while others fill city streets, stadiums, town squares, monuments or religious temples. Still others are linked to a special spot on the natural landscape such as a body of water, a mountain, or a forest.



**How** people celebrate also varies enormously. Celebrations might be spontaneous and last only



a few hours or extend for months or even longer. That said, some common aspects of these festivities include **gathering** with family, friends, and even strangers; then once together, we perform special activities. We might sing and dance, tell stories, or say prayers and incantations. Participants will often dress up as well – either formally or in special costumes, and body ornamentations of various kinds are regularly applied. Special objects (such as a lantern, a wreath, a drum, or a Christmas tree, for example) are often associated with these celebratory activities and can play a central role in our traditions. Hence, taken together, there is a clear element of **performance** and **ritual** in many celebrations.



Celebrations regularly involve feasting and fasting. Special foods are often prepared and consumed (sometimes only during that one celebration), and during other celebrations there are also periods of fasting. In addition to sharing food, many celebrations also involve the exchange of gifts, both large and small.



But perhaps most importantly, we should ask **why** we all love to celebrate. Anthropologists and sociologists have studied this question extensively and the reasons for celebrating are many. In general, celebrations take us away from the mundane and ordinary aspects of our everyday lives. They can allow us to have fun and sometimes behave





in ways that might otherwise not be allowed. Psychologically, celebrations often make us, or those we love, feel special or honoured. We can also feel a powerful sense of belonging. Likewise, they can make us feel more connected to our family, friends, and our cultural heritage and traditions. They reinforce what is important in our lives, our personal values, and often

our religion. On a more tangible level, celebrations allow us to share wealth and food with each other. They can thus help to redistribute resources, especially when these are scarce or unequally distributed. Of course, they can serve to enhance the status of those who can afford to give much to others. Celebrations can also bring economic benefits to certain groups who produce goods for sale for such events. And elaborate celebrations also draw tourists (and their dollars) to the communities that host them.



Of course, this list is only a starting point for understanding why celebrations are so important to us, but enough from me!

-----

The main goal of our time together today is for you to discuss, with a small group of your peers in a breakout session, what is celebrated in **your** culture, especially where **women** play a central role. This might be a celebration for women or prepared by women or featuring women in a specific role; it might be a large festival, an intimate family gathering, or something in between.

So, for the interactive part of this conversation, we hope you will tell us about a celebration in your culture. Of course you do not need to share! If you wish, you may also share **some specific aspect of this celebration – such as an object, photograph, piece of clothing, dance, recipe, song, or story**. And as we learn from each other, let's search for the themes and commonalities that unite our celebratory lives.