



Winter festivals

By Sonia Singham

Around this time of the year, there are many religious festivals. The Hindus celebrate Divali; the Muslims, Ramadan; the Jews, Hanukkah; the Christians, Christmas.

DIVALI - For some Hindus, Divali marks the start of the New Year. Homes are decorated with small lights known as divas, which were originally lit to guide the god Rama back home and also to welcome Lakshmi, goddess of good fortune, into their homes. Hindus visit the temple, exchange cards and gifts and enjoy special meals.

RAMADAN - A religious festival when, during the month, Muslims fast from dawn to sunset. Muslims believe that by fasting, they are following the wishes of Allah as written in their holy book, the Qur'an. It is one of the five duties which Muslims try to carry out. The others are believing in Allah and the prophet Muhammad, praying five times a day, giving to the poor and making the pilgrimage to Mecca. At the end of Ramadan is the festival of Id-ul-Fitr. Muslims visit the mosque to say special prayers and afterwards celebrate with parties and presents.

HANUKKAH - A Jewish festival which recalls the time when a wicked king marched into Jerusalem and ransacked the Temple. The Jews won back the city, but found that there was only enough oil to light the Menorah, the special lamp in the Temple, for one day. However, after praying to God, a miracle happened and the lamp burned for eight days until more oil arrived. Hence, Jews celebrate Hanukkah by lighting a nine-branched menorah, or candlestick: The ninth candle being used to light the other eight. There are also parties and presents for children.

CHRISTMAS - The first Christians chose 25 December to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The story of Jesus' birth can be found in the New Testament in the Bible and, in many schools, the Nativity Play is performed. On Christmas Day many Christians attend church to thank God for the birth of his son and sing joyful carols. Christmas is celebrated with a special meal. The gifts exchanged are reminders of those given to the baby Jesus over 2,000 years ago.



Majjo (left) meeting Cherie Blair at the Asian Women of Distinction lunch. Photo by Sadrudin J Verjee.

Some Like it Hot

By Daphne Chamberlain

What is your favourite anti-cold remedy? Majjo Ashraf, of East Finchley's celebrated Indian take-away in Fortis Green, recommends thinking hot, - i.e. spices. Spices have always been highly valued. In the days of the East India Company they were literally worth their weight in gold to traders, but now we can all have them in our kitchens.

Ginger, garlic and turmeric are Majjo's leading anti-cold fighters. Many of us already swear by root ginger, freshly-squeezed lemon juice and honey in hot water, but we could also try cinnamon and ginger tea. Allow two inches of sliced ginger-root and one cinnamon stick for each cup, and boil in water for some time. You can add honey, and/or "show it a teabag". (Green tea is good.) Those of us who don't get swamped with mucous when consuming dairy products could try a cup of hot milk with either half a teaspoon each of turmeric and honey, or nutmeg and a pinch of saffron.

Personally, I can't wait to taste red lentil dhal with ginger, garlic, chilli powder and raw onions, topped up with water to make a soup.

Feed a cold?

Majjo was brought up on these traditional antidotes for coughs, sniffles and respiratory infections, and still doses her own family with them today. Chewing on cloves to ease a sore throat was particularly popular with one of her sons, who used to pretend it hadn't worked, just so he could have another one.

When she herself was recovering from pneumonia

last year, she dosed herself liberally with ginger, turmeric and honey.

On her mother's side, Majjo is descended from a line of doctors, and she is very interested in beneficial uses and combinations of food, both internally and externally. Over the next few months she will share some

of her knowledge with *ARCHER* readers. Some of her tips may well surprise you.

Meanwhile, if you would like to sample some traditional remedies for your ailments, you could pop into her Fortis Green shop (tel. 020 8883 4357). If Majjo is there, she will make up a sample dose for you.

Homage to O'Henry

Part 1: A winter's tale, New York

By Anthony Tuck

In the 1950s I saw a black and white film, *Full House*, based on three stories by the celebrated American short story writer, O'Henry. One story, *The Last Leaf*, starring Anne Baxter and Hugo Haas, remains unforgettable. It is set in Greenwich Village, New York, at the turn of the century, where two aspiring artists, Sue and Johnsy have a studio. One winter, Johnsy is struck down with pneumonia. From her sickbed, poorly and very weak, she looks out of a small window at an old gnarled vine growing on a brick wall. Lying there day after day, Johnsy watches and weakens as, one by one, the leaves fall off the vine until there are just five left. Fatalistically, Johnsy tells Sue and the doctor that when the last leaf falls off the vine she too will die.

On the ground floor below Sue and Johnsy lives an old failed, drunken painter called Berhman. For forty years he has painted without success, yet he still talks of his coming masterpiece. Scornful of softness, yet regarding himself as the protector of the two young artists, Berhman is contemptuous of Johnsy's vow to die when the last leaf falls.

Inspiration

One night a storm rages. When dawn comes, Johnsy, fully expecting the vine to be bare, is surprised to see one solitary leaf still defiantly clinging to life. Inspired by its determination, Johnsy's will to

live returns. When Johnsy is out of danger, Sue tells her the sad news that old Berhman has died of pneumonia. He was found clutching a still-lighted lantern, paintbrushes and a palette with green and yellow colours mixed on it. His shoes and clothing were wet through and icy cold and no one knew where he had been on such a dreadful winter night.

Gazing out of the window, Johnsy realises why the last leaf never fluttered or moved when the bitter winter wind blew. It is Berhman's masterpiece painted on the wall the night the last leaf fell...

To be continued.



Mike Jacobs (right) being presented with their certificate by Tollit & Harvey representative John Curry.

UOE goes totally tropical!

Local retailer UOE, of the High Road, has been highly commended in a national window dressing competition. The competition, run by stationery manufacturers Tollit & Harvey Ltd, required entrants to create a 'tropical' themed window display to promote the brightly coloured Europa range of files, folders and pads. UOE put together a vivid display which brightened up High Rd over a four week period this Summer.

Nick Parry, general manager of merchandising for Tollit & Harvey, commented: "UOE's window display obviously took a great deal of time, effort and creative flair to produce, and they thoroughly deserve their commendation".

Pony Excess?

Parking space in Durham Road was severely restricted near the junction with Fortis Green by a film crew and all its paraphernalia, including a little black pony. They were making an advert in a local house for the Harvester chain of restaurants.

Apparently, the storyline involves a young girl having the pony in the house unbeknown to her father! If you are intrigued, you can see what happens when it is screened this month.