

Season of Light / 'Tis the Season Frequently Asked Questions

QUESTION: Why isn't there anything about Kwanzaa in your Christmas show?

SHORT ANSWER: This show is about Yuletide customs, seasons, solstice celebrations, centuries-old traditions of bringing light to a dark time of year -- and the Star of Bethlehem. Kwanzaa's practices and precepts are not directly related to any of these themes, and the traditional celebration of Kwanzaa urges the celebrants NOT to mix this celebration with any other culture or religion.

LONG ANSWER: While we are not at all insensitive to the beauty of the cultural precepts behind Kwanzaa, shoehorning it into a show about something else would be as awkward as including references to Al-Hijira or Ashura on the Islamic calendar, or Bodhi Day on the Buddhist calendar. Simply because many cultural festivities occur in December doesn't make them appropriate to mention in conjunction with Yuletide customs. To do so would likely be disrespectful to those whose beliefs encompass them.

According to the Official Kwanzaa Web Site (www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org), written by the founder, Dr. Maulana Karenga, the 7-day holiday was started in the U.S. in 1966 as part of a Pan-African cultural outreach, and originally conceived as a celebration of the first fruits of the harvest. While Kwanzaa begins on December 26, right after Christmas, it's pretty clear from the founder's intent that it is not to be combined with any other Yuletide events and practices, as stated on the web site:

First, you should come to the celebration with a profound respect for its values, symbols and practices and do nothing to violate its integrity, beauty and expansive meaning. Secondly, you should not mix the Kwanzaa holiday or its symbols, values and practice with any other culture. This would violate the principles of Kujichagulia (Self-Determination) and thus violate the integrity of the holiday. Thirdly, choose the best and most beautiful items to celebrate Kwanzaa. This means taking time to plan and select the most beautiful objects of art, colorful African cloth, fresh fruits and vegetables, etc. so that every object used represents African culture and your commitment to the holiday in the best of ways.

Also from the Web site, the precepts of Kwanzaa:

- *A time of ingathering of the people to reaffirm the bonds between them;*
- *A time of special reverence for the creator and creation in thanks and respect for the blessings, bountifulness and beauty of creation;*
- *A time for commemoration of the past in pursuit of its lessons and in honor of its models of human excellence, our ancestors;*
- *A time of recommitment to our highest cultural ideals in our ongoing effort to always bring forth the best of African cultural thought and practice; and*
- *A time for celebration of the Good, the good of life and of existence itself, the good of family, community and culture, the good of the awesome and the ordinary, in a word the good of the divine, natural and social.*

Given all that, there's simply nothing astronomical/historical about Kwanzaa to warrant inclusion in an astronomical/historical show.