ast week, after a very

long time, three gen

erations of the fami-

ly sat down to dine

together. In addition,

we had a couple of visiting cousins

seen for long. At first,

the good meal kept

the conversation at

low ebb but as we began to be sati-

ated, the conversation began to

flow. Thank God, the mobiles had

been put away! To begin with, it

was catching up. How are the

boys? How does an empty nest feel? Physical demands and the

need to consult a doctor more fre-

quently was another major topic

for us, the older people. Finally, as

we became relaxed, the reminis-

cences began. The happy memo-

ries of childhood soon followed

with major events in life where all

of us had moments to enjoy

USA, began to tell us her plans to

visit Goa, Kolkata and Darjeeling.

She was being asked to keep her

visit to her elderly aunt in Kolkata

a surprise, that too by her son,

who lives in the same flat with his

was not sure if this was a good

idea. The aunt has a fixed sched-

ule and often has to go out to visit

the doctor and temples. She does

some social work too. A surprise

visit may play havoc with her

schedule. Naturally, the discus-

sion now veered to surprises. On

polling the group, there were both

sorts of views. While some were

happy to be surprised, others were

disinclined. They had reserva-

tions. Others wanted to qualify the

surprise. Bad news was not

acceptable while they were game

to be surprised with a good ges-

ture even though, it may incon-

venience them. For that matter,

Of course, the inevitable

occurred and the question about

the best surprises in life had to be

talked about. Javant and Nalini

spoke about their 'Silver Wedding

Anniversary'. It just happened

that their anniversary followed

our 50th Wedding Anniversary.

They had organised a gala affair

for us. They had planned it well

with imagination and great enthu-

siasm. Friends and family from

afar and near had been given

ample notice. The numbers of

acceptance were much higher

than anticipated. It was a huge

well-orchestrated event at the City

Palace in Jaipur. What made it

more interesting was that it was

bad news is always a surprise!

mother. Joya commented that she

Joya, who was visiting from

edged. At those times, it is wise to

consult another member of the

family to see that all is hunky-

dory. Surprise can backfire

because of lack of information.

Bringing a surprise dish that

contains nuts can be quite dis-

tressing for people who are aller-

gic. I know a person, who is a veg-

etarian and allergic to garlic. He

would certainly feel quite uncom-

fortable in a *'Kebab and Curry*'

place, even if there are vegetari

an options. The smells in such

to be kept in mind is how well the

person will be able to make use of

the surprise gift. For example, it is

all very good to arrange a fully

oaid holiday. Remember, the

adventure holiday you are gifting

may be well beyond the abilities of

an older person. A much preferred

one would be a more sedentary

place with a good view. Good food

never fails to give joy. But then, I have a friend who likes simple

food. No elaborate fried meals for

him. Not even spicy food or sweets.

Unpleasant surprises are mostly inadvertent or destiny. As a

surgeon, I am always prepared for

surprises during an operation. All

the same when a blood vessel

bursts in an unexpected location

the surprise is taxing. The ability

to deal with surprises with a calm demeanour and equanimity is

Whether you like it or not, you

probably the only solution.

They are wasted on him.

Another simple thing that has

places can put one off.

राष्ट्रदुत

#EPISTEMIC ACTIONS

Why Scientists Are Interested In Shaking Presents

There are few things more delightful than seeing a child's eyes light up as they pick up a present and wonder what might be inside



vou shake the present with your name on it, know that people watch ing, can tell what objects or the shape of what's

more delightful than seeing a child's eyes light up as they pick up a present and wonder what might be inside," says author Chaz Firestone, an assistant professor of Psychological and Brain Sciences at Johns Hopkins University, who investigates how vision and thought inter-

"What our work shows is that your mind is able to track the information they are seeking. Just as they might be able to tell what's inside the box by shaking it around, you can tell what they are trying to fig ure out, when they shake it." In a series of experiments the researchers asked hundreds of people to watch oth-

ers shake boxes. "It took just seconds for most of them to know whether the box shaker was trying to learn either how many things were in the box or the shape of things in the box. Although the boxes weren't presents, and the contents weren't smartwatches, Legos, or Red Ryder BB guns, and if they were, the results would have been the same.' the researchers say.

"The way you would shake a present to find out if it's one thing or many things, or if it's a small thing versus a big thing, can be subtly different," says lead author Sholei Croom, a Johns Hopkins graduate student. "But people are amazing at picking up on such

Recognizing another person's actions is something we do every day, whether it's

guessing which way someone is headed or figuring out what object they're reaching for. These are known as "pragmatic actions." Numerous studies have shown people can quickly and accurately identify these actions just by watching them. The new work investigates a different kind of behaviour, "epistemic

actions" which are performed

when someone is trying to

learn something. For instance, someone might put their foot in a swimming pool because they're going for a swim or they might put their foot in a pool to test the water. Though the actions are similar, there are differences and the Johns Hopkins team surmised that observers would be able to detect another person's "epistemic goals" just by watching

work by perception researchers is the first to demonstrate that people can tell what others are trying to learn just by watching their actions. The work, published in the journal, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, reveals a key, yet neglected, aspect of human "When we present this

work, we always talk about Christmas Firestone says. "It's the perfect real-life example of our exper iment." In the future, the team would like to pursue whether people can observe someone's epistemic intent versus their pragmatic intent, what are they up to, when they dip their foot in the pool. They're also interested in knowing when these observational skills emerge in human development and if it's possible to build computational models to detail exactly how observed physical actions reveal epistemic intent.

Winterscape



N.N. Sachitanand Senior journalist

As Old Sol's warriors beat a retreat Winter's demons overrun the sky Changing the mantle's sulphur glow Into a sickly hue of leaden grey.

And soon launch a flurry of winds, Setting the leaves shivering fearfully, Beasts of prey that stalk the streets Sans moan or whine or revealing rustle

As through chink and hole, gap and rent, Their icy tendrils reach the victim Cowering in his insulated sanctum

No armour of clothing invincible is

Often they are the scythe of Death. Relentlessly attacking the destitute When their pathetic little shield Of a bonfire turns to ashes.

But all is not grim in the season As hot delicacies make a bow And Cupid strikes down inhibitions



social media, text messages and mobile calls. Some intimate friends called in bearing gifts. They had been warned not to talk about the evening's programme. The first problem that cropped up was that Jayant and Nalini were showing no signs of going to work, that morning. Surabhi began signaling anxiously that they should be sent to work forthwith as the caterers and the decorators were due any minute. If the work force was seen, the whole surprise would be spoilt. Somehow, we managed to get them to work and started setting up the place at high speed for the evening event. By five o'clock, all was ready. We had even prepared placards with Happy Anniversary signs. When Jayant and Nalini entered the compound in the evening, the surprise was total!

hen the grandchildren

Nalini's Silver wedding anniver-

sary celebrations, we realised

that no plans had been made

Sukriti were enthusiastic and

said that they could do a gala

event in our front lawns. With

them a go ahead with a carte

blank. Within two days, all was

ready. The menu was selected

and the caterers were booked.

being held in an inner courtyard

asked about Javant and Nalini's

Silver wedding anniversary cele-

brations, we realised that no plans

had been made for it. Fortunately,

Surabhi and Sukriti were enthusi-

astic and said that they could do a

gala event in our front lawns. With

the venue issue solved, we gave

them a go ahead with a carte

blank. Within two days, all was

ready. The menu was selected and

the caterers were booked. Flowers

and decoration was planned. The

liquor supplies had been

arranged. All of us decided to give

anniversary wishes poured in by

social media, text messages and

mobile calls. Some intimate

friends called in bearing gifts.

about the evening's programme.

They had been warned not to talk

The day arrived. Happy

So, when the grandchildren

for the first time.

them a surprise.

the venue issue solved, we gave

for it. Fortunately, Surabhi and

asked about Jayant and



#FAMILY

Flask and fan from Mandai Bird Paradise.

he had to pick up an item from the

Jaipur Club. He stopped the car at

the decorated gate to the side lawn

and it dawned upon us that a sur-

prise celebration had been

arranged. All friends and family

were there. Even people who had

spoken on the phone in the morn-

ing were smiling away at the com-

plete surprise that they had

achieved. The happy memories

and the surprise have lasted all

Surprises do not have to be big

A week ago, as we sat down for

rang. The courier had a small par-

cel for us. We were not expecting

any deliveries. The parcel was

from Singapore. Rahul, who lives

in Singapore, had not mentioned

anything either. After we finished

our meal, we slit open the card

board box. Out popped a beautiful

small sized flask with a bird motif.

The other item was a Japanese

paper fan. We were surprised with

the items. The sealed envelope in

the recesses of the package

explained the gifts. It was a very

graceful letter from the communi

cations manager of the Mandai

someone that you care. You have

iming of surprises is very important. A surprise party may disrupt an already planned event. Appearing at someone's home unannounced can be very double-edged. At those times, it is wise to consult another member of the family to see that all is hunky-dory. Surprise can backfire because of lack of information. Bringing a surprise dish that contains nuts can be quite distressing for people who are allergic.

though good is not as important as the effort. Timing of surprises is very important. A surprise party may disrupt an already planned event. Appearing at someone's home

Bird Paradise in Singapore. We had spent a whole day there when we were in Singapore, a few months ago. I had even written a piece for Arbit in Rashtradoot. It seems that Rahul had sent that clipping to them saying how good a publicity it was, for them. In appreciation, they had sent us these gifts. It was such a pleasant Surprises are hard work. I has to be meticulously planned in a sly manner. The important part is that it is only good, be it an event or a gift, when you are fully aware of likes and dislikes of the person, you are surprising. Surprises are meant to show

OF THE

POSSIBILITIES!

the desire to make them happy. Just to make sure, it is wise to have a backup plan. It also is an indication about how well you know them. The gift has to be chosen not only because it is good but also, how well it will be appreciated. For example, I have a cousin who loves fountain pens. The other day, I presented a Mont Blanc pen to him. Although he had many, he was overjoyed to add one more to his collection. When one is not sure of what gift is to be given to a person, who seems to have every thing, it is always safe to go for a simple thing like a perfume or a knick-knack. Here, the item,

> will get surprises. Just be prepared. Think of all the effort that goes behind a proper surprise.



Merry Christmas

Christmas has a magical way of bringing out the best in us

erry Christmas 2023 Traditions and History: It's that wonderful time of the year again as the fee tivity of the most awaited festivals around the globe has began! Everywhere you go, you'll find Christmas trees and twinkling lights, turning red and green into our favourite The air is filled with the aroma

of delicious Christmas cakes and the excitement of unwrapping festive gifts. Christmas has a magical way of bringing out the best in us and it's all for the right reasons. As we gear up for the Merry

Christmas 2023 holiday season preparations are in full swing. People, all over the world, come together on December 25th to celebrate Christmas, commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ. However, not many are aware of the reason behind choosing December 25th for this joyous occasion. Let's delve into the details to uncover the story behind this jolly festival.



What is the History and origin of Christmas?

hristmas, rooted in Christian tradition, celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ. Originating in the 4th century, the date was set on December 25 to coincide with pagan festivals. Over time, diverse cultures incorporated customs like gift-giving and feasts. In the Middle Ages, caroling gained popularity, spreading joy. The Puritans frowned upon festivities, but by the Victorian era. Christmas trees and cards became widespread. In the 20th century, commercialism surged, shaping the modern celebration. Today, Christmas unites people globally, transcending religious boundaries, as families gather, exchange gifts, and partake in festive cheer, symbolizing love, kindness, and joy.



What is the significance of Christmas?

hristmas holds immense signif worldwide, symbolizing love, peace, and togetherness. It commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ, promoting goodwill and kindness. Families unite, exchanging gifts and relishing festive feasts. Decorations illu minate homes, fostering a warm, festive spirit. Beyond religious connotations, Christmas fosters a universal sense of generosity, encouraging acts of charity and compas sion. The holiday season promotes reflection, gratitude, and bonding, emphasizing the importance of spreading happiness

It's a time when people set aside differences, embracing shared humanity. In essence. Christmas transcends religious boundaries, fostering a global sense of unity, joy,

Why is Christmas Celebrated On December 25th?



n ecember 25th is celebrated as Christmas to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ. While the exact date of Jesus' birth is not specified in the Bible, December 25th was chosen by early Christians to coincide with pagan winter solstice festivals. This strategic selection aimed to integrate Christianity into existing celebrations, making it more acceptable. Over time. December 25th became widely accepted as Jesus' birthday, leading to the global celebration of Christmas. The festive day emphasizes joy, love, and goodwill, with traditions like gift-giving and festive decorations, fostering a sense of unity and happiness among people,

How is Christmas Celebrated in India?

clebrating Christmas in India can be a unique and diverse experience due to the country's rich cultural tapestry. Here are some wavs in vou can celebrate Christmas in India: In India, Christmas is a rela-

tively small festival compared to other religious celebrations. This is because the percentage of Christians in the country is between 2-3% which is much lower than the number of followers of other religions. Yet, it is celebrated every year with great pomp and enthusiasm across the

country. Mumbai has one of the biggest Christian communities in India and most them follow the Roman Catholic faith. A significant number of Christians in Mumbai trace their origins back to Goa. Additionally, the north-eastern states of Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Mizoram have substantial Christian populations.

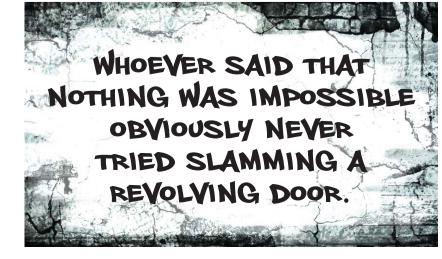
Midnight Mass is a signifi-

cant part of Christmas cele brations in India. Many churches hold special services on Christmas Eve, starting around midnight. Attendees participate in prayers, caro singing, and the festive mass Gift-giving is a common Christmas tradition Exchange gifts with family and friends as a way of expressing love and joy.

Instead of using traditional Christmas Trees, some folks opt for decorating a banana or mango tree or any tree they can find! At times, people even use mango leaves to adorn their homes during the festive season A delightful tradition known

as 'consuada' involves fami lies making an array of sweets before Christmas and sharing them with friends and neighbours. Many Christian households also feature a nativity scene adorned with clay figures, adding a touch of tradition to their festive celebrations

THE WALL



BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



ZITS

GOTOA PARTY THIS WEEKEND!





The first problem that cropped up

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Anniversary signs. When Jayant

and Nalini entered the compound

in the evening, the surprise was

Even today, when they speak

Nirmal and I had no special

about it, there is a happy glow on

plans for our 40th wedding

anniversary. Since anniversary

dav is a national holidav, we had

planned to have a family meal at

the new restaurant on Jacob Road

in the Civil Lines. Their Keema

Bati was famous. The time had

arrived. We piled into the car.

When we crossed the railway

bridge on Ajmer road, we had to

turn left for the restaurant.

instead, Jayant turned the car to

the right. I looked at him question-

ingly. He casually mentioned that