another birthday

by Josh Thompson, November 2019

What a joyous event! Somebody has another birthday today!

Not like the ones they've had before,

This one is special

For now, they are 4

or 40 or 15 or 2

Ya' know, any old birthday will do.

For this is the day we celebrate you, or you, or anybody, truly.

Each of us gets a birthday, every year.

Sometimes there's cake\* with candles\*, or pinata\*, or Aarti with Pujas\*.

And there's a party! Mostly it's family and friends, co-workers and colleagues.

Sometimes it's planned well in advance, or a spur of the moment.

Many kids know it's a time to sift and sort friends.

Make threats and promises:

"You can come to my party, and bring me a gift!"

or

"You can't come to my birthday party!"

In all of life's world, there are so many birthdays

and so many ways to say, "Glad you came here this day!"

And just as many ways to say goodbye.

Because, of course, we all die.

Some live long and grow prosperous.

Some die young, and leave behind such promise.

And just as there are so many ways to celebrate birthdays,

We all have countless number of ways to grieve,

To commemorate a life, to cry over loss, to wonder what happens next?

Because, for now, we are fixed in a line, from the beginning of time,

to a day (far away?) when we'll breath our last. A mystery.

But truly, no less than the mystery of birth! How amazing, how joyful, how filled with glee,

The whole earth's excited, on the day you were born,

you became you, and i became me.

CAKE It is believed that the first actual birthday cake was made in Germany in the Middle Ages. The Germans would celebrate children’s birthdays with cake, calling the celebration Kinderfest. Cakes originally were a coarse, bread-like product, and later became a much sweeter version, called Geburtstagorten.

CANDLES One theory is that the history of putting candles on cake began in Ancient Greece. The Greeks would make round cakes to honor Artemis, the goddess of the moon. The lit candles on the cake represented the glow of the moon, and the smoke from the candles carried their prayers and wishes to the Gods who lived in the skies. Some scholars believe the tradition actually started in Germany, where a candle was supposedly placed on the cake to represent “the light of life”.

*PUJAS* (prayers) are usually performed again at home typically led by the eldest female member of the family. During the *pujas,* an A*arti* (a prayerful ceremony of light) is performed. The *Aarti* consists of a small flame that burns on a wick in ghee. The wick is placed on a round silver plate and rotated around the birthday girl or boy as blessings are bestowed. The *Aarti* can be performed a few times, as female members of the family take turns giving their blessings. During the *puja*, a *tikka* made of rice mixed with ghee (butter) or curd (yogurt) and coloured powder is placed on the guest of honour’s forehead.

<https://theculturetrip.com/asia/india/articles/7-unique-ways-birthdays-celebrated-india/>