

Jacobson

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their budgets in a materialistic effort to show their children love and just how wonderful Christmas can be. This causes stress in the parent and eventually resentment when the child doesn't fully appreciate the effort. Many students go home and feel pressure to make their short family time as wonderful as possible while trying to fend off questions about their academic, work and personal lives from prying parents.

The best way to fend off any excess angst is to simply employ the Golden

Mean theory to navigating life's wonderful little stressors. Focusing too much on these problems causes one to be overwrought and irritable and to lose the Christmas spirit. Avoidance is just as damaging in the long run because it builds resentment, and the root problems are never fixed.

The same balance should be applied to one's direct actions. Don't give too many presents and break your bank account, but don't give everybody a buy-one-get-one-free Wendy's burger coupon. Don't drink too much, but don't be so paranoid you won't have a little bubbly to ring in the new year. Feed the homeless, but don't rob the mouths of your own family.

Such a basis for decision making is remarkably simple and incredibly beneficial. But remember, the other part of the Golden Mean virtue also says you shouldn't make too many judgmental comments when someone else performs those minor trespasses.

But with all that moderation talk behind, remember, if you have to horde anything, horde family time. It's far too precious to let slip unrelaxed. Happy holidays.

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Payne

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You know the drill: Jupiter, the Thunder God; Juno, his wife; Venus, the goddess of love; Mars, Minerva, Neptune, ad nauseam.

The worst of it was that in the new, godly Roman Empire, wild parties were still the norm. No, frats were still thousands of years off. To sate the Romans' need for toga keggers, there existed a festival known as *Natalis Solis Invicti*, or the "Birth of the Invincible Sun." NSI, for short, was dedicated to the god Mithras, who was a major contender with Christ. The festival consisted mainly of lots and lots of drinking and revelry. Throngs choked the streets, singing and dancing, as the *posca* (cheap Roman wine) flowed as freely as revelers to the vomitoriums. Just like New Year's today.

And so, with the mindset of "drunken debauchery makes Baby

Jesus cry," both the Emperor and the Pope looked to find ways to curb the festivities and gain new converts to boot. Suddenly, the Pope declared, Jesus was born on the 25th day of December, and, therefore, the day should be as sober and solemn as befits the birth of the Savior.

"Spūcatum tauri!" the people responded, in a well-known phrase describing male cow dung, as they went about their revels. Stung, the powers that be tried a new tack: If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. And so, the Pope once again, in A.D. 354, stated that Christ was born on Dec. 25. This time, he also allowed for moderate celebrations, and so, almost from the first, "Christmas" and "joyful celebration" were synonymous. The people latched on quickly, and soon Mithras was a fading memory.

Christmas certainly isn't the only holiday on the block in December. There's something about

the dead of winter that just screams for a party. Hanukkah, the Jewish "Feast of Lights," takes place in early December. The Muslim holy month of Ramadan, marked with daytime fasting, often ends in December. The African-American festival Kwanzaa has been celebrated for more than 30 years around Christmastime.

The whole upshot is this: December, for all its gray skies and chilly weather, is a joyful month no matter how you slice it. Be with your family and friends and celebrate the season, regardless of whether you're celebrating the birth of Jesus, the victory of the Maccabees at Jerusalem Temple or even the old *Natalis Solis Invictis*. Just celebrate and have a good time. Everyone's gotta party once in a while.

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Kleckner

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All Ye Faithful." I brighten when I see a menorah, and I have hope when I see the Kikombe cha Umoja, the Kwanzaa Unity Cup. Fasting for Ramadan is super honorable, and I rarely turn down a Roman-style night of hedonism.

So I'm torn: Do I want my holiday boundaries respected, or do I want to encourage it all? My dilemma was further knotted last week, when the City of Eugene decided to ban Christmas trees in publicly-owned workplaces.

The question for me isn't, "Is a Christmas tree a religious symbol?" Of course it is. It's also not; it depends on the person. But to someone not of a Judeo-Christian faith and not interested in a secular party involving red and green decorations, it represents foreign beliefs and traditions. Shouldn't we all have the right to ask not to be ex-

posed to it?

No, actually, I don't think we have that right. Tolerance and diversity win out for me here. I know those two buzzwords are nearly impotent, but we can replenish their meaning. In a respectable society, tolerance and diversity should represent extreme inclusion — as much willingness to compromise for other people's freedoms as you want extended to yours.

So as to the Christmas tree ban? We're not talking about impressionable minors in school. These are adults working in city offices, y'all. Yes, these are government buildings. But we're big kids now. Adults can handle looking at someone else's temporary display of either religious or secular joy and celebration. We're mature enough to allow others their deeply held beliefs and traditions.

Non-believers should think about the displays and the doctrines and critically examine them. We don't have to adopt any of these

faiths, and we're not injured by seeing them. Humanity could actually benefit from such exposure, no? And it's possible to find enjoyment in the value these things have for others.

So for the sake of the good and the just, seasonal celebrators could go a little easier on those who don't dig it. And those who are looking to be left alone for the month should be willing to respect the freedom of their community's expression.

For my part, I'm escaping to Europe for the rest of December, and I won't begrudge anyone a Christmas tree or a dreidel, or whatever your flavor is. But do me a favor — have a safe and happy holiday season. Please share whatever you can with whomever you meet. And I'll talk to you in January.

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Bergerson

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by everyone. A scooter, a Sony Playstation2, Teckno the robotic puppy, a wireless personal digital assistant or mega-pixel digital camera — the gifts pile up and the once-beautiful packages are in shreds all over the floor. As soon as all the presents have been opened and displayed and put away, Christmas is then officially considered done.

No, wait. Ham, corn, mashed potatoes, yams, cheesecake, cookies spill in profusion all over the dining room. Food! What Christmas would be good without the food? And it can't be a modest dinner. No, it must be a banquet! Every platter drips with gooey good food that will stick to your insides for hours to come (and the calories will stick with you even longer).

But to another segment of the

population, Christmas is a time for family. This population, presumably, is made up of those who actually like spending time with their families. Every year, the family unites under one roof. Time to hear Uncle Fred's crazy sports stories again and pig out on Aunt Barb's pumpkin pie. The men congregate in the den to watch football as the women gossip in the kitchen (or the other way around).

The house is abuzz with laughter, voices talking excitedly about all that happened in the past year. And as goodbyes are said and hugs are exchanged, a small sadness hovers over the family because a bit of Christmas leaves with each retreating family member. But when the last one is out the door and quiet descends once again, happiness returns in memories.

And we must not forget those who see Christmas as a symbol for something larger, much bigger

than themselves. Two thousand years ago, a savior lay in a manger. Born of a virgin, he came to earth to bridge the distance between God and his creation. He brings love and abundant life. Ever since then, Christmas has been set aside as a time for those who believe in Christ to celebrate his birth.

All these things — food, decorations, family, music, faith — are ingredients to the Christmas holiday. And I am sure there are many more. But Christmas is only as much as you put into it. It can be all of those things or nothing at all. However meaningful or superficial your Christmas becomes this year is entirely up to you. May your Christmas be a merry one.

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