

Jim Roth: Focusing on the meaning of the holidays

By [Jim Roth](#), Director and Chair of the Firm's Clean Energy Practice Group. [Gavel to Gavel](#) appears in The Journal Record. This column was [originally published in The Journal Record](#) on Dec. 7, 2015.



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During this holiday season with parties, travel and the mad dash to purchase (and afford) gifts for those loved ones in our lives, it's often too easy to focus on the wrapping rather than the meaning of the season.

To a variety of faiths, this time of year has significant historical meaning:

- Christmas by Christians – It is believed that ancient Christians took over Saturnalia, an ancient Roman Pagan seven-day festival of Saturn that started on Dec. 17, and used it to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ, although evidence within the Bible (Luke, etc.) suggests His birth during a warmer month like October when the shepherds were still in their fields keeping watch over their flocks.
- Winter solstice is celebrated by some Native Americans and aboriginals in the rest of the world.
- Hanukkah (aka Festival of Lights) by Jews – This eight-day/night Jewish holiday begins on the 25th day of Kislev, which can occur in very late November or during December and commemorates the redirection of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem at the time of the Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucid Empire.
- Bohdi Day by Buddhists – recalling the day that Buddha attained enlightenment as Dec. 8.
- Id al-Fitr or Ashura (aka Feast of Sacrifice) by Muslims – Whether Sunni or Shiite, this holiday commemorates events significant to Muhammad and typically involves fasting.

So as we rush around, too often engaged in the commercialization of the “season,” a few ideas come to mind about how we all can slow down, catch our breath and actually engage in a few ways that any deity would want for us and the world around you.

While some gifts are practical items, such as those socks and T-shirts many have come to expect each year, most gifts are really intended as gestures of love, kindness and thoughtfulness. So although many kids prefer those shiny new toys, consider giving your adult loved ones a gift of service or an experience instead of a store-bought item. Be creative

and show your thoughtfulness by giving of yourself rather than your credit.

This can be done in many ways beyond material goods. Consider a homemade edible gift that showcases a family recipe to share or plants some bulbs in their yard for gifts this coming spring. Look for a family heirloom around your home that would be meaningful to share and pay it forward to the next generation. You can also offer a charitable contribution to an organization that may symbolize what's most important to you this time of year, such as Heifer International, which helps impoverished families feed themselves, earn income and care for their environment.

Likewise, many food banks and food pantries are in ever-increasing need for help as the plight of hunger is felt by many people, including many children here in America.

So whether you choose to celebrate one of the seasonal holidays or are simply looking for ways to bring more meaning to your gift-giving, please join me in thinking of ways to demonstrate thoughtfulness to your loved ones and to the world around us; the real reason for the season.

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