

True meanings of holidays

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Mind-Body-Spirit Introduction The United States of America prides itself on diversity, freedom and religious expression. Culturally, Americans have a common trend; the celebration of holidays. In most recent days, holidays have been condensed to a festival of bargains, retail finds and materialistic trinkets. We have reduced some of our most sacred holidays into giving and receiving gifts. Christmas, Valentine's Day, Halloween, and Thanksgiving are just a few examples of how today's society has skewed the true religious, diverse meaning of the holiday. The prime example would be Christmas. Christmas is supposed to be a holy day of celebration; the symbolic birth of Christianity's Son of God. But many children know Christmas for presents, Santa, and school vacation. Adults use Christmas time to ruin their credit with overspending, while ruining their waistline with overeating. Another holiday more commonly known for gift giving rather than actual sentiment is Valentine's Day. I've associated Valentine's Day with red roses, catchy love phrases, and cherubs with bow and arrows. The significance behind Valentine's Day is widely unknown or forgotten. Halloween is good example of religious diversity in American culture that has been twisted into a holiday based on the consumer market. The pagan implications of Halloween are reduced to which action hero costume is fashionable and attending parties. Many Americans are unaware that Halloween has history. Lastly, Thanksgiving is another American holiday based more on overindulgence rather than significance. Although, Thanksgiving is known for the American traditions; Pilgrims, Native Americans, and giving thanks; the original concept for this day was left in the past. We celebrate the cranberry sauce, stuffing and turkey, not traditions. Questions Why do Americans celebrate

various holidays? What is the true meaning of Christmas; and was the Son of God born on the twenty-fifth day of the month of December? And, how did February 14th become the day to represent love? Why is candy given to children dressed in costumes on Halloween and what is the Pagan significance of this day? What is the true meaning or significance of Thanksgiving for American culture? Summary Sonia Choquette, a world-renowned motivational teacher/speaker, said the true meaning of Christmas is not based solely on religion, but also the festival of the human heart. Christianity is based on the overwhelming belief that Jesus, Son of God was born on this day. But Americans understand the heartfelt significance this season brings. The heart warms over the traditions of this holiday; the smell of a freshly cut Christmas tree, and thoughts of peace, love, sweetness and safety. Christmas emphasizes the generosity of the human heart and soul. Although some aspects of the holiday have become commercialized, overall we are inspired by feelings of warmth, love, joy and peace. It is the Christmas Spirit. So “ we celebrate the season with such an intention and desire, we not only experience Christmas... we actually become Christmas: an agent of rebirth of the soul and the bringer of light. ” I asked the question, how did February 14th become the day to represent love? The true meaning of Valentine’s Day came from an ancient fable. It is believed that St. Valentine, a Roman priest who would secretly marry young couples that loved each other, but did not have parental permission to wed. He also refused to worship pagan gods, and was sent to jail for treason. While in jail, Valentine fell in love with the daughter of his jailer. But with his execution approaching, he would send his love notes, signed ‘ from your Valentine’.

Saint Valentine was executed on February 14, 269 A. D. And in 496 A. D., he was granted sainthood. The anniversary of Saint Valentine's death became the traditional day to be engaged; and young Romans would celebrate with romantic poetry and music. The beginning of Halloween is just as mystical as the holiday itself. The true meaning of Halloween is derived from an early Celtic holiday. Two thousand years ago, October 31st marked the end of summer and the beginning of winter. Since inventions like electricity had not been discovered, this season signified shorter days and longer nights. Celtic people believed spirits of the dead roamed free, and to scare away the evil spirits, people would carve scary faces on large gourds and disguise themselves in costumes. But with the Catholic Church persecuting people for pagan practices, the Pope created a new religious celebration called All Saints Day. This day, November 2nd, would honor every Catholic saint by dressing in a saintly costume and go door to door begging for food to feed the town's poor. Some say, All Saints Day was a day to honor the dead, similar to the Celtic pagan rituals. Over time, the pagan and Catholic customs began to merge, joining the two holidays into "All Hollow's Eve". The present-day Halloween has combined the beliefs to ensure that children dressed in costume, going door to door begging for "trick or treat" enjoy all of the spooky phenomena. The true meaning of Thanksgiving is difficult to define without reiterating the history and tradition behind this invented American holiday. Americans are aware of the Pilgrims and Native Americans ("Indians") meeting and having their first feast. In the year 1621 the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag Indians shared a noon time feast, now known as Thanksgiving. Many people are unaware that the first feast lasted three

days, was not repeated, not on the fourth Thursday in the month of November, nor was it called Thanksgiving. History says "to (pilgrims) thanksgiving was a religious holiday on which they would go to church and thank God for a specific event, such as the winning of a battle". To commemorate the original Thanksgiving, a day of fasting and prayer was established by Gov. William Bradford. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln appointed what is known today as Thanksgiving Day, annually celebrated on the last Thursday in November. But the true meaning of Thanksgiving is considered a holiday to celebrate family, honor and feast. Conclusion In conclusion, it is the consensus; most Americans agree that holidays are too commercial and too hectic. Americans need to promote family togetherness, to ensure future generations understand the true meaning for all holidays. Although in some families religion influences which holidays are celebrated, the practice of educating and signifying to loved-ones helps to develop the significance behind all holidays. We need to learn about different religions and cultures in America. This country is the melting pot of traditions, cultures, and religions. To learn about others celebrates the richness of our country.