

On the Edge

Timely, Thoughtful and Always Candid

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Happy Holidays? Bah...Humbug! Don't Let "Politically Correct" Spoil Your Season's Greetings

"Merry Christmas", "Happy Hanukah" or "Happy Holidays"? It's a dilemma that's a sign of the times. Over the past month, I've heard more than a few people grumble that their company has gone too far by renaming the traditional Christmas party a holiday party. "How dare they!" seems to be the sentiment. Others bitterly (but in a low voice) protest the notion that they should have to say, "Happy holidays" when in fact they personally celebrate Christmas. And a "holiday tree"? You don't EVEN want to go there! Yet the fact of the matter is that we live in increasingly diverse communities and don't really know just what some people celebrate...or even if they celebrate something this time of the year.

Having been married into a mixed religion (Christian and Jewish) household for almost a decade, I understand their angst. I've often felt the tug between clinging to my own traditions and letting go to honor those of my wife's family. This time of the year in particular, the familiar sound of Christmas songs on the radios and at malls takes me back to very fond memories of my childhood and early adult years. The phrase "Merry Christmas" conveys a certain warmth and caring that takes me to an emotional space that's safe, sacred and still very much alive. But that's not the case for everyone else.

Here's my take. Ask yourself a simple question: What is your intent when you extend a greeting to another person? Is it to announce what you *personally* celebrate or is it to offer an expression of celebration for *their* benefit? In most cases, it's the latter. If you know that someone else celebrates Christmas, then offer a hearty "Merry Christmas"! If you know they're Jewish, then smile and say "Happy Hanukah"! If you don't know, but still want to extend the greeting, then "Happy holidays" is the safe way to go. The point is, we should always act on our best available awareness. Don't let ignorance or arrogance be your guide. I personally respond to any greeting someone offers me with a huge smile and a heartfelt "Thank you...the same to you!"

- Paul Meshanko

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