

## **Remembering Community on Valentine's Day**

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Valentine's Day is a time when we give gifts as symbols or tokens of our romantic love, friendship, and family bonds. We hope to let the recipients know that we care about them and that they are meaningful in our lives. But as with many holiday practices, the rituals themselves can become the focus of our time, energy and efforts to such an extent that we lose sight of the actual holiday's meaning and purpose. Who has not been struck by the shallowness of some Christmas time commercial or advertisement and wondered what happened to the spirit of the holiday? We know the spirit of the season is still there by the very fact that we are bothered by the commercial. It gives us a jolt and whispers, "That is not me!" The spirit is well and alive in us. We often have to give a "gift from the heart" of little monetary worth in order to cut through the materialism that has become so pervasive in our society. A sincere and heartfelt gesture lets our loved ones know how much we truly care for them.

Before we give, let us make sure that we remember the ritual, practice or holiday is a tool to express our feelings and not the purpose itself. For example, many do this at Christmas by volunteering at a homeless shelter or by adopting a needy family. Not only do the needy benefit from such an "act of random kindness" but we find the real meaning of what we celebrate and keep the spirit of the holiday alive. How closely would our community resemble the way we envision it if we put this act to practice this Valentine's Day? What creative ways can we use in extending our celebration beyond our loved ones to show we care for those we even do not yet know? With challenges today of the American economy it is vital that we reach out to our community with love and compassion. So accustomed to the day-to-day hustle and bustle to merely survive, most of us do not even know our neighbors. We have lost the connection with community that was once such an intricate part of our "villages."

This Valentine's Day let us join our hearts, minds, and spirits and celebrate the joy of being alive and express our gratitude to each other. It takes each of us to make a strong community and each one of us has a special contribution to make in this world. Let's choose to honor each others special gifts and together our community will bloom.