

A Christmas Dhamma Reflection

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Summary of an online Dhammatalk, 25 December 2023

On this Christmas Day, we began our time together by engaging in a beautiful act of generosity towards all beings—a collective gift of kindness and well-wishing to the world. The Buddha's first teaching emphasized the importance of generosity, and what better way to express this than by offering each other heartfelt wishes of peace, safety, and well-being, especially in a world that so often lacks these qualities.

Several participants shared their wishes for the world: safety, peace, and care for all beings, including the inner children within us. These simple yet profound desires echo the universal longing for peace and security, even though the world remains full of conflict and suffering. The paradox is striking—everyone desires peace, yet the world is far from it. However, the radical power of metta, or loving-kindness, allows us to wish for peace and happiness for all beings, regardless of the current state of the world.

The practice of metta is not just a wishful thought; it is a powerful act that plants seeds of peace within us and in the world. Just as a small oak tree planted in Belgium symbolizes the growing presence of metta, our collective practice nurtures a deep internal peace, the only true peace that exists. This peace can prevail despite external chaos, offering a place of refuge and balance within.

The Buddha often spoke of peace, describing it as a natural outcome of wisdom and compassion. True peace is not found in controlling external conditions but in cultivating equanimity—an inner balance that remains unshaken by the world's turmoil. This peace of equanimity, concentration, and even Nibbana (liberation) is accessible to all of us, though it requires effort, practice, and a deep understanding of the impermanent nature of life.

As we walk this path together, supporting one another, we strengthen our ability to access this peace. Our practice not only benefits ourselves but also impacts the world around us. When we embody peace, we offer it as a gift to others, influencing those we interact with. Being the calm presence in a room, the one who can respond with wisdom and compassion, is no small feat—it is a significant contribution to the well-being of the world.

In these challenging times, as the world seems to be moving deeper into darkness, it is essential not to be discouraged. Instead, we must continue to practice, to incline our hearts towards kindness and wisdom, and to embrace the possibility of peace. This practice leads us away from despair and into the realm of possibility, where even the smallest sliver of peace can make a difference.

As we close this gathering, we remember the power of our practice and the importance of continuing on this path, no matter the difficulties. May we all dwell in the land of possibility, focusing on kindness, wisdom, and the potential for peace within and around us.

Merry Christmas, everyone. May you all be well, and may peace be with you all.