



December 2001 Contemplation Theme

The Peace That Passeth Understanding

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You cannot think yourself into peace. Once you clear your mind, the deeper feeling of peace can emerge. Peace is beyond the mind. There are many things of which the mind is not capable. Peace is one of them. This is the season when we celebrate peace — or at least it shows up in our songs. As I walk down the street, I hear the muzak playing the melody. My mind fills in the words without me even trying, “Peace on earth, goodwill toward men.” But, today the earth is not at peace. It has not been for a long time.

When I moved into my first home, I wanted to make it a haven from the world. I decorated my small apartment with beautiful budget items and hand-me-downs, and I kept fresh flowers in vases as often as I could afford. I carefully selected background music that creates a soothing and peaceful effect. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. I found that I was completely capable of being so overwrought that I didn't notice any of it. Jon Kabat-Zinn titled a book after it, Wherever You Go, There You Are. You take yourself with you no matter where you are.

There is an important problem hidden in this story. If you want your home to be a haven, you actually see the world as being a hostile place. It may be an unrecognized attitude, but it is there. As you become able to recognize this in yourself, you also see how your attitude creates the problems that you encounter as you go through your life. I would love to be able to point my finger and blame the rude sales clerk or the belligerent driver. Yet, I know that I have created it, countless times, by my own actions and attitude. The world is a mirror. It reflects you back to yourself. What you put out comes back to you, the way you put it out and the “why” you put it out.

As a yogi, however, you must look at even a deeper level, called dependency. You depend on the externals to be just right before you can feel peace. What happens to you if your neighbors have a noisy party? With all your doors and windows closed, you can still hear their happy sound. Are you happy that they are happy, or do you call the police? What if city workmen block your usual road and the detour takes you an extra five minutes? If someone at home is unhappy or angry, how do you feel, whether you caused it or not?

So many yogis have told me that they want to move to the forest, the desert or a remote tropical island. Or, they can't wait for their month in the family beach cottage every year. They want the place to be a paradise, so it will give them peace. These places are wonderful, but relying on them for your peace is a sophisticated (and often expensive) form of dependency. Worse, relying on the environment for your peace ultimately means that you must control your environment. If a logger threatens the woods, a motorcyclist comes zooming past your home in the desert, or a hurricane damages your beach or island, you lose your peace. That is because you never really had it, on the inside. Instead, you must create an inner environment to you take with you everywhere you go.

This inner peace is the only thing that can create peace in the world. Any time you look outside of yourself for peace, you are destined to live in agitation. The world is not at peace because we do not look for the peace that is already there on the inside. This brings us back to where I began. You cannot think yourself into peace. Words will not take you there. You must clear your mind for the inner peace to arise. Make the world a paradise of peace. Do more yoga.

Namasté,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Rama'. Above the signature is a small, simple line drawing of a heart.