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Christmas Presence

Global Cooperation House, London
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Walking in from a bitter winter's night into a warm, cosy, beautifully decorated golden space was a great welcome to the 'non-commercial aspects of Christmas'. The evening started with Handel's *Where'er you walk*, sung by guest soprano Denise Alonzo. The audience was invited to share individually first and then with the whole group what Christmas really means to them. The main themes were: generosity, caring, family time, peace and gifts

Matthew Earl then related his personal experience of the magic of Christmas, after first asking who believed in Santa Claus and then challenging the audience to accept that Father Xmas is very real. He talked about the origins of Santa Claus going back to Bishop Nicholas in the 6th Century. Stories of Saint Nicholas include tales of his generosity, given anonymously and often at night and evolve into him becoming the patron saint of children. St Nicolas transforms from the Dutch Sinterklaas, who left gifts in children's shoes at the fireplace, to the modern Santa Claus, riding reindeer, coming down chimneys and leaving gifts for children. His generosity and his example led to the modern trend of giving generously during the Christmas season - not only to loved ones, especially children, but also to the needy. The real Father Xmas is God and thus we are all his children. God comes at night (when we are in darkness) when we are unconscious (asleep) and gives us special presents and gifts (blessings and virtues). And the more we give of these gifts to others, the more we get.

Adesose Wallace performed a drumming interlude to celebrate the special gift and blessing mankind received in the form of the birth of Christ.

Davina Lloyd facilitated an interactive session, where everyone split into groups of five and 'built' a spiritual tool (positive affirmation) and then exchanged it with others in the group. This exercise enabled everyone to experience the theme of the evening and the consensus was that the affirmation resonated with the person sharing it in a unique and personal way.

Sister Jayanti shared the following:

"What I see that makes Christmas holy are two important ingredients at the heart of the human soul: peace and love. Christmas is when the Prince of Peace (Christ) was sent, when things were off track (mankind lost in chaos and darkness) and for a while it worked. But now we are lost again and in order to bring that message of peace back and to share it, I need to go within. The second aspect in the story of Christmas and sharing is love. Abraham became instrumental in creating the foundation based on Law (the Commandments) but God wanted a balance between love and law and so he sent Christ to share, experience and help us remember God's love. We express this love by caring, sharing, giving etc. during Christmas. Peace and love are the two essences of the soul and that is why we say 'om shanti'



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to remind ourselves. Yet, for something so natural, we have lost it and so this Christmas we should practise cultivating it. Think of peace and love in three different ways: first, it is my natural state, so no matter what happens externally, I can maintain it. Second, to be true to myself I need to be consistent in peace and also love. Then, as I develop and maintain this more and more on an external level, the ethics (code of conduct) we follow are very different to those of the external world today, which is predominantly aggression and violence. I was reading in the paper about Education of Peace for football fans. There was a discussion on how to bring about peace. How can we change our culture from aggression to peace? By beginning inside, if I can change my natural awareness and state of being to love, experience God's love and see others with that vision, I will create that culture. Take it a step further and experience peace as a power. A power we can generate and use for transformation. Visibly, it may not seem like anything is happening but you can change the world with this practice. This is not an imaginary concept but something I believe is a reality. We can also experience love - not just as a quality but also as a power. Experiencing love as a power for the self can heal all the wounds which we carry: present and past, long hidden and buried within. It's possible to experience this by accepting God's love and then sharing it. So I hope this Christmas we can experience this and then share it by changing our code of conduct."

The evening ended with Denise Alonzo singing the original Silent Night by Franz Gruber. There was a collective moment which evoked the essence of the evening's talk, when one person recounted how the quality of generosity that Christmas meant to him was the very quality he received in the group interactive session and so he felt the magic of the evening.

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