

Reply from Santa

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[Joel Lee \(National University of Singapore, Faculty of Law\)](#)

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[Writer's note 1: In the spirit of whimsy that sets upon me during the lead up to Christmas, I wrote a [letter to Santa Claus](#) last year. This year, I received a reply from Santa that I would like to share with you here. (I will leave readers to decide whether my medication is losing its efficacy)

I am grateful to Ms. Linda Heng (the Mediation@SG network) and my students from the Negotiation Workshop 2013/2014; Nigel Yeo, Jo-siah Lau and Grace Chan, for their collective contributions to this piece.

As with last year, for those readers who do not celebrate or like Christmas; or those who do not like or believe in Santa Claus; or those who generally don't like whimsy, please ignore this post and accept my apologies.]

Dear Joel,

Thank you for your lovely letter of December last. I am sorry it has taken me some time to get back to you. You know how it is. All those presents to deliver and letters to reply. I even have to get Mrs. Claus and the elves to help reply to some letters. But yours, I wanted to reply personally.

I am as well as can be. A little overweight I'm afraid. Mrs. Claus has put me on a strict vegetarian diet (bleah) and eating all those carrots has made my skin an unusual tinge of orange. I hope I don't scare anyone this year when I deliver their presents!

You have asked for the gifts of perspective and understanding, connection and empathy, and forgiveness and healing. While your letter and your requests were somewhat unusual to receive, it was not unique. I received a letter many years ago, asking for much the same things.

The problem I faced then is that I could not give human beings these gifts directly. Your people have a saying "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink". Wise words. And it is the same with humans. You are sometimes so preoccupied with your problems that they become your entire world. You lose sight of what is important and being "right" takes priority over being "happy". The water is there but you fail to drink it. Sometimes, you even fail to perceive the water is there or that you are thirsty.

The challenge then is to "make the horse thirsty enough to drink of its own accord". Back then, I chose to fulfill those wishes, not directly, but by providing them the means to understand, connect and forgive. I gifted humankind a group of people who can help parties realize that there are ways to see the world other what they perceive, and they will be the richer for knowing and seeing them. They can show parties that the "other side" is just another human like them, that they too have a heart and a life of their own and can slowly guide parties to move on from the past, to accept, to forgive, to love, and to know that there is too little time left in life to be continually caught up in the past.

I gave them mediators. While mediators are not perfect people, they proceed from a desire to help others resolve their conflicts amicably. I gave them the ability to read people well and to identify mutual human concerns (which exist more often than we realize or care to admit) that will assist parties to repair relationships in order to solve the problem. The burden they bear is that they may not always succeed. A heavy burden indeed, which I hope is ameliorated by the satisfaction of their successes.

My wish is that mediators will go forth and through their actions, change people. And as others gain the self-awareness and mastery of these gifts, teach them to spread the gifts to people in their own lives. Make this a world to which people want to belong. And with some luck, we might just achieve world peace.

I'll stop here Joel. Many more things to do before Christmas!

Be well and keep doing what you and so many other mediators are doing. And in your darkest moments, remember that you are making a difference.

Merry Christmas!

Santa

P.S. Thank you for the milk and cookies. They will be especially appreciated this year after this vegetarian diet. Please ignore any notes you may receive from Mrs. Claus about putting out carrot sticks.

P.P.S. The Reindeer are fine. They are in training for Christmas and are still finding some time to play, as the song goes, their Reindeer games. I have delivered your pat to Rudolph and he says "Hi".

P.P.P.S. The elves are hard at work making toys and are generally getting along. One of them is a bit mischievous though. He watched the Lord of the Rings Trilogy the other night and fancies himself as Legolas and has since been going around shooting rubber arrows at the other elves shouting "For Gondor!" Sigh. Although it's quite funny, I'm going to have to have a conversation with that one.