



# Chicago

If you were to walk down State Street, Chicago, this evening, you would undoubtedly hear the refrain from any one of a thousand Christmas carols pouring from the trumpets and trombones of the many Salvation Army soldiers standing on corners. It is the sound of a city between seasons. Thanksgiving has just ended, and with that, people have become frightfully aware that Christmas is not far away.

In a town like this, at a time like this, the advantages of 'big city' life are a little bit easier to see. Perhaps the greatest advantage is accessibility. The people are friendlier (though a bit in a hurry), stores are pregnant with merchandise for the hungry customers — and the causes seem more pressing than ever before.

All these things, when jammed together into the bustle of things, create an effect. Everyone stops to look at the animated window displays of the big stores like Marshall Field's, Carson's Department, and the dozens of others that line what has come to be known as the 'State Street Mall.' The trees are lighted with hundreds of tiny specks of electric fire, and reflect off of the wet pavement. If the Santa, passing out copies of the latest translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*, overlooks your presence, the sad faced little hindu woman will be sure to see that you have an "I love Chicago" button.

Even though these people want you to give them money, they don't think that they are obligating it by giving their little gifts. Maybe this is the entire point of the season. The free giving. No one can deny the elation felt when they receive a neat little gift, but a lot of people feel an elation of a different sort in the giving itself. Think about it. It doesn't matter whether or not you believe in religions here, or in eastern Asia, or even if in a god at all; the point is (and all the faiths eventually get around to saying this) that the joy of giving can be a thing that no gift received could ever match.

Photos and article by Ken Sonnenberg

