

“THIS I BELIEVE:” REFLECTIONS ON GRACE
The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
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Linda Clark:

I participated in an online self-development course from Sept, 2015 until March, 2016. During the course we had an assignment to create note cards, that we used like daily flash cards. On each card I noted a life experience. I called about a dozen of the cards “Grace cards”, so I’ve been thinking about Grace quite a bit over the last months, and here are some of my musings.

I checked the dictionary, and one definition of Grace is “approval, kindness or protection given by God.” And serendipity is defined as “the fact of finding interesting or valuable things by chance.”

I have experienced so many things, some of them very important things, that have occurred “by chance” or serendipity. In fact, when I write the words “by chance”, I put them in quotes, because even though those experiences were outside my conscious control, I feel like they were definitely by design. I think of them as instances of Grace.

Some have been pivotal and life changing. Some were little things. But they always leave me feeling guided or gifted, not necessarily by God, but by someone or something outside of the one I think of as “me”.

Here’s an example of a daily life Grace. A few years ago, I rearranged some furniture in my house, and that left a space that called out for some sort of lovely bookshelf. I was imagining a shelf with unusual lightness and openness. Well, about two hours later, on a dog walk, we went a little farther than usual, turned the corner and there was a yard sale – with exactly the bookcase, in fact a pair of them, very inexpensive, in perfect condition, and with just the right touch of glass and simplicity. They were perfect, and the only thing I did was to create the space. No shopping, no hunting, I just created the space, and they appeared on the very same day! They were a gift of Grace to me. I am still thankful when I see them.

Some years back, I heard a talk by Ed Jastrams, and he shared concepts that give me a framework to understand how Grace could happen. Ed was retired from MIT. I think he was a physicist. Coincidentally, the talk took place in a meeting room of the beautiful First Parish UU in Concord, MA, the church which Ralph Waldo Emerson joined in 1865.

Anyway, as part of his talk, Ed described the Hawaiian Huna model of a human. The basics are that we are 3-part beings: unihipili, uhane, and Aumakua, or in English: subconscious, conscious, and Higher Self. The Hawaiian words are much more elegant than the English, because every syllable, and even each group of syllables, carries a specific meaning that help to define the word. You can find descriptions in this little book called “Huna”, by William Glover.

Anyway, Uhane, my conscious mind is the decision maker. Uhane is “the self who talks”. She makes judgement calls, and sets goals and intentions. She is basically the one I experience as me. It’s important to note that in the Huna model, Uhane has no direct line of communication to Higher Self.

Unihipili, the subconscious runs the body, and memory, and has energy connections to everyone and everything. She cannot talk, but she understands my thoughts and intentions. When I wake up at the time I intend, or one minute before the alarm clock, I thank Unihipili, my subconscious for that bit of Grace. Unihipili *is* in direct communication with Aumakua, with Higher Self.

One translation of Aumakua is “utterly trustworthy parental spirit”. Aumakua has a much broader and wiser view than me, and can connect with the Aumakua of other people. There’s a lot more, but that’s enough for now.

Here’s an example of a Grace that only occurred thanks to the convergence of several people and events. This Grace was profound, and not instant like the bookcase story.

Once upon a time, I decided to do more advanced piano study. I already had my Bachelor’s degree in music, and was very particular about who I would study with.

My subconscious heard my intention and passed it along to Higher Self, and the results went way beyond anything I could have imagined. Roberta was my neighbor and a flautist I often played and performed with. She invited me to Vermont for a weekend to audit a flute master class given by her 90-year-old master-teacher, Marcel Moyse. The lady at the bed & breakfast where we stayed asked me if I knew John Buttrick, a pianist from MIT who was coaching at a chamber music summer school at a nearby college, and the rest is history. Not only was Buttrick the perfect piano coach for me, but he also introduced me to the whole field of Energy Kinesiology which became such an important part of my life.

It was a beautiful instance of Grace. My Higher Self, my Aumakua, brought me together with all the right people, at the right time, to create this beautiful Grace that came from a level of life-changing vision way beyond my conscious awareness.

I enjoy reviewing my deck of Grace Cards, and I am always grateful for and encouraged by the many Graces I have experienced. They especially seem to come when I have laid the groundwork or when I am open, ready and able to recognize and accept Grace when it arrives. I’m humbled, happy and relieved, to know that conscious-me doesn’t have to do everything, and in fact *can’t* do everything. And I am grateful to sense that “I” is actually a team with amazing capabilities.

I’m sure I’m not unique in this. I bet you have enjoyed similar amazing Graces, too.

Marion Habermehl:

Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me I once was lost but now am found was blind but now I see.

When I left the Christian church I left behind the concept of a supernatural event over 2000 years ago saving my soul today. I left behind the idea that I was utterly lost and wretched, and required external redemption. I left behind the idea that there is a heaven and a hell. But I didn't let go of the idea of grace. Of grace having a place in the modern world, of being operative in my life. And so I can still appreciate this old hymn. I appreciate what it must have meant for John Newton, the writer of these words. He operated a slave ship and totally destroyed the lives of hundreds of people, before he came to understand the Christian imperative of living a morally just life. To look back at his career and his life would have filled him with much self-loathing. It was only his belief in, and experience of, grace that gave him hope; that saved him.

There is that grace, the grace of God, that helps me understand everyday grace in our world. The grace that we, as people, demonstrate. This Grace, to me, is bound up by love. Not romantic love, that we feel for one or a few close people, but love for all with which we share our world. A general love. Grace is the operative aspect of love; a physical, or emotional expression of love. One way we show our Love for the world, for friends and strangers, for nature, for art, for beauty, is through our graceful interactions with it. I can see this love in the way that athletes and dancers move with such grace. I think they love movement itself, physical expressiveness, and/or the competition, strategy and game. Visual artists, whose lines and colour take graceful control, who love that process of creation, who can lose themselves in it. And you've seen musicians move gracefully; you can tell they love the process they are part of when they make music, that they get so deep into their playing that they move gracefully. And by doing so, they all grace us with their talents and skills.

Spending time with this theme this month has heightened my awareness of the everyday occasions of grace around me, a good thing! I am reminded that we do so much with love, in so many contexts, without being explicit about it.

The Grace we show is love in action. One specific way that I have witnessed and experienced Grace in my life is through the grace of medical professionals.

When my daughter was born, unlike the more common experience of being eager to show off your baby, I did not like for strangers to see her; unless those strangers were medical professionals, on the job or not. With her facial difference, it was only close friends, our UU community, and medical professionals that could see her beauty and utter cuteness, seeing past her cleft lip.

The hospital nurses showed strength and composure during her precipitous delivery, to which the doctor could not get quickly enough, so that she was born in minutes, carried away from my body by nurses who unwrapped the tight cord around her neck, who first saw her cleft, who checked her vitals and placed her on my chest. Who gently told me of her facial difference. Giving a parent news like that cannot be easy. Everybody wants things to work out the right way, to be easy. When it's not, a nurse's response to the unexpected situation has such an impact. When the nurse told me of her cleft, she also shared how moved she was by Rowan's birth; she said she had felt angels in the

room, guiding the delivery, and protecting my child. The nurse honoured the sacredness of the birth, and she met me in the sensitive place I was; she did her work with grace.

When Rowan was only four months old, she had her first surgery. It was so hard to see her afterwards, it seemed such innocence lost, as she struggled, hurt and confused, with coming out of the anesthesia. An aging Dr. Gruss repaired her lip and later closed her cleft palate. Although his manner with parents was gruff, his grace was as an artist, an incredibly talented plastic surgeon, who treated his task and my daughter's face with utmost respect.

I am very humbled by the expertise, the technical skills, the deep knowledge and the broad competency that doctors, nurses, and all manner of ancillary medical professionals possess. And yet, I am not surprised they have those things. However, an unexpected quality that I have witnessed in hospitals and clinics over and over again is that of Grace. This is not taught. It comes to professionals, in varying degrees and at varying times in their day, in their career, but it is a quality that makes such an impact on their practice and on their patients. I think Grace finds its way in, through some combination of the hard work they have done, the specific knowledge they have gained, the hundreds of hours of clinical practice, joined with the desire to help, to relieve pain and suffering, and the sincerity with which they take their role.

Rowan saw Ear, Nose and Throat doctors, who assessed and inserted ear tubes, and oral surgeons and orthodontists and dentists, who have over the years shaped and cared for her teeth. At age 10, a nurse soothingly spoke to Rowan as she numbed her skin in order to draw blood and to place a pic line, in preparation for surgery. Dr. Phillips completed a bone graft which healed well and provided the structure her jaw needed. The post-op nurses managed her wound care and pain management professionally and warmly.

When Rowan was 13, Dr. Fisher demonstrated skill and commitment and respect in the lip revision he did. Again, all the professionals from pre-op to surgery to post-op completed their tasks with confidence and kindness.

And next week, we will again see Grace in action at Sick Kids. Of that, I have no doubt. Not anymore, not after hundreds of interactions with medical professionals. That Grace seeps through what doctors and nurses and assistants and therapists do is, I believe, enabled by their specific knowledge and technical skills, by their commitment to their practice and to their role of helping people, by respect for science and the scientific method, by dedication to their profession and upholding it, and by accepting their role as instruments of healing. Sure, egos and agendas sometimes get in the way of perfect expressions of Grace, but when people fully step into their roles as professionals devoted to helping others in specific ways, there is room for Grace to follow.

In closing, I have to add one more outstanding example of Grace. That of my daughter. From infancy through to young adulthood, she has shown tremendous courage and grace in the face of uncertainty, difference, fear, and pain. She gracefully places her trust

in the hands of skilled professionals, she allows herself to be led into dark and unknown places, trusting that she will emerge again, a little different than she was, but strong and still fully herself. When she was three years old, she asked us repeatedly to read her the picture book "Franklin Goes to the Hospital", so often that I would hear lines from it as I fell asleep at night. Perhaps the story reminded her of her best self, where it states: "Just because you are afraid doesn't mean you aren't brave. Being brave means doing what you have to do, no matter how scared you feel." That, too, takes Grace.

Grace is love in action, and we all show grace when we love the people, the work and the world we engage with.

Arthur Herold:

I received an unexpected visit by Grace one night when I was in my early 20s. My story will make more sense if I provide a bit of context by way of my personal history.

My father was a doctor, and a very hard working professional, while my mother was a homemaker. My mother had experienced a psychotic break during childbirth, and was subsequently diagnosed with bipolar disorder. My childhood was punctuated by her many and recurring hospitalizations. My sister and I were cared for mainly by our "maid," a childless and loving African American woman whose sometimes gruff manner disguised a tender, compassionate heart.

I was an adventurous boy who was happy to ride his bike around the town, taking advantage of the lackadaisical supervision that occurred at home. My way of relating to the world was modelled on my father's style: I approached life through intellect and rationality, and kept my emotions in check.

When my sister confided in me her distress in not feeling loved, I calmly pointed out to her that our parents put food on the table and a roof over our head, so they obviously loved us, no problem. As I moved through my teens, this way of relating to life seemed to serve me pretty well; I was pretty good on the high school debate team. However, I did view young women as overly emotional and difficult to relate to in that sense.

Fast forward to a night in my early 20's. I had driven all day to New Orleans to visit my sister, and was sleep deprived from several days of overwork and over-partying. It was about 10 p.m. when she and her friends went out to pick up some food. I lay down on my back on her bed in her apartment, propped my head on the pillow, and just relaxed.

For no particular reason that I was aware of, I began to feel a sort of vibration encompassing my stomach and my heart. It got more and more intense. I had no idea what was happening, but felt very distressed. Like a small explosion, weeping came. The weeping came in great heaves. A dam had broken and I was just convulsing with crying for about 20 minutes.

Then there was a deep peace and relaxation, as I lay back on the bed reflecting on what had occurred. I knew for certain what it was about. I was feeling my sadness. The dam had broken and 22 years of pent up grief had come gushing out.

This uninvited invasion of emotion, this occasion of grace, was a watershed in my life. I will not say that it entirely opened me up to my feelings, because that is a long-term process, but kicked ajar a door that had long been shut, locked, and bolted.

Irene Magill:

I believe I am here for a reason. I am learning that reason every day of my life. I have been in grade one for many years and longer in others. I struggled through those years; however, I did have a backup. My back up is My love of God. When I was young the name was 'God'. Now there are many names and all are right for someone. As a child the belief that God might send me to hell, did not stop me from loving "HIM".

In my family, religion was never mentioned. My religious life started with my friend Deedee; we went to the Gospel Hall. I got saved every Sunday to make sure I didn't go to hell. I asked my dad and he said he was saved but my mom wasn't. I was fearful for years of her going to hell. My dad said he stopped going to a self-made preacher whom he held high, when he found the man starving and beating his horses.

I left the Gospel Hall due to feelings of rejection and ridicule by pretty, well dressed girls. I was about 10 years old.

Later there was a force within urging me to find the 'right Church'. I went everywhere and did receive information and inspiration that was helpful then, and still is.

I studied with TV Preachers; we conversed by mail. I read Spiritual; Self Help; Inspirational and Autobiographies. I got involved with Philosophical groups. Sometimes I was told I was naive. Perhaps I was but I never was hurt as the voice within said "this is not for me", and to walk away.

I would "accidentally" find a book in Coles bookstore leading me to something, somewhere new. Sufis of the West took me to New York and India. TM took me to France and Switzerland; Unity took me to Missouri; Being a Christ took me to California. Hypnosis took me to New York, New York and here. Jehovah Witnesses took away the fear of eating pork -even though I wasn't of Jewish Faith. Many individuals were of great help; especially in helping me to heal.

I could go on with my past experiences -Natural Health, Dowsing, Reiki, Johrei, Chanting; Shamanism; Spiritual Counselling - the list is long.

NOW, what has this to do with Grace. A short while ago I could not have told you how ever I realize now what it is for me. AND that in itself is Grace.

Grace is that urging within; the push that terrified me; like this morning. It saw me through even in times of fear or what seemed like dangerous bad moves. Grace is what safely brought me through after responding to the urge. I didn't/don't always respond

to the urge.

Grace is what answered my "Vision" last Sunday at the Conversation Workshop. It answered the 'risk' I was 'willing' to take. That answer was to be up here now.

My Vision was and is that we be a merry group of people who can look at each other and speak to each other from our hearts. My Vision is that I know your deep Spiritual connection and honour it as yours. I hold Jesus Christ in high regards and place his name in my prayers along with 'MY' OWN CHRIST SELF -Spirit of Life to you.

My Vision is that you will feel you can speak with me and I to you whether happy or sad. To know who to approach and say "I am needing someone to sit with for a moment and pray with me", and that person will say "okay." Prayer also takes many forms.

My Vision has times of gathering for straight enjoyment of each other, young and old. Whether it be with dancing, pot lucks, games, movies; whatever. A time spent away from the serious side of life.

The risk I was willing to take was speaking up for my Vision. And the GRACE is that Jovanna asked me to speak this morning. A greater Grace is I have gotten to a place within me that tells me that I am being held safe and loved always. And that -like in the past- whatever creative idea that passes my mind is ready to be filled. I have begun to realize it is okay to desire something and not think 'greedy'.

I am aware that schooling never stops. That schooling for me is to become closer and closer to the Beloved until I 'know' we ALL are ONE.

I am seeing the differences in nature as only on the outside. Two trees may be totally different to look at however that which lies within them is the same -The Spirit of Life. Whatever tree I hug or touch in the morning will give me back the same response and a tiny giggle will come from my lips.

Grace is 'knowing' that we are already whole and that the word 'deserve' has no place in the realm of the Beloved -the Spirit of Life.

Thank you for listening and supporting me; I have been Graced once more.

God Bless you.