

State of Grace

I WAS ASKED, "HOW DOES ONE KNOW HIS/HER OWN WILL, HOW DOES ONE KNOW WHAT S/HE IS SUPPOSED TO DO?" THIS NEXT SERIES OF POSTS WILL LOOK AT THIS FROM AN UNUSUAL PERSPECTIVE. I WANT TO EXPLORE 'THE STATE OF GRACE', THAT BEAUTIFUL PHRASE OR CONCEPT THAT PLAYS SO MANY EMOTIONAL CHORDS IN OUR SONGS OF LIFE. THIS ESSAY IS MORE PHILOSOPHICAL THAN USUAL. I HOPE IT STIMULATES YOUR IDEAS AND THOUGHTS.

LATELY THERE HAVE BEEN A LOT OF COMMENTS ABOUT DEATH, FEAR AND LOSS. IT IS SO EASY TO BECOME STUCK THERE. THE 'STATE OF GRACE' IS A FEELING OR IDEA THAT CAN HELP US MOVE FORWARD. THIS IS A PHRASE WE HEAR A LOT, OCCASIONALLY USE, BUT SELDOM CONSIDER FOR ITS MEANING. IT IS A PROFOUND CONCEPT, FOUND IN VIRTUALLY EVERY RELIGION, EXPRESSED IN A VARIETY OF WORDS, TERMS, RITES, AND ACTS. WHY DO WE NOT 'GET IT'?

REDUCED TO ITS SIMPLEST RELIGIOUS FUNCTION, BUT NOT MEANING; IT IS A NECESSARY PLACE TO FIND SPIRITUALLY IN ORDER TO PASS FROM THIS LIFE WITHOUT COMPLICATION. I IMAGINE YOU ARE THINKING,

"WELL, THAT WAS HELPFUL!" TRUE, IT IS NOT MUCH, JUST A BEGINNING FOR WHAT FOLLOWS. THIS ESSAY LOOKS AT THE STATE OF GRACE AS SOMETHING MORE THAN JUST A PLACE THROUGH WHICH TO DIE WITHOUT NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES.

FOR MOST CHRISTIANS A STATE OF GRACE IS ACHIEVED WHEN ONE HAS PROFESSED, CONFESSED, AND HAS BEEN ABSOLVED OF SIN BEFORE DEATH. THE RITES TO ACHIEVE THIS STATE ARE USUALLY PERFORMED JUST PRIOR THE MOMENT OF DEATH, TYPICALLY WITH THE AID OF A MINISTER. I SUSPECT ONE REASON FOR THIS TIMING IS TO MINIMIZE THE RISK OF NEW SINS INTERFERING WITH THE EFFECT OF THE RITES. ONE WOULD HOPE THAT IT NEED NOT BE SO CLOSELY TIMED.

IN OTHER RELIGIONS, THE STATE OF GRACE IS ACHIEVED THROUGH ACTS OF RENUNCIATION IN WHICH ONE STRIPS AWAY AND DISCARDS WORLDLY GOODS AND CONCERNS. WHILE THE METHODS OF DOING SO VARY CONSIDERABLY ACCORDING TO PRACTICE AND LOCATION, THE EFFECT IS THE SAME. IN THESE RELIGIONS, IT IS CONCEIVABLE TO LIVE WHILE IN SUCH A STATE, ALTHOUGH THE PRACTITIONER BECOMES REMOVED FROM MUCH OF WHAT IS THOUGHT TO COMPOSE LIFE.

ONE ISSUE I HAVE WITH BOTH OF THESE CONCEPTS IS THE IDEA THAT A STATE OF GRACE REQUIRES THE REMOVAL OF THE INDIVIDUAL FROM LIFE OR THE PROCESS OF LIVING. WE LIVE IN A WORLD THAT IS HIGHLY INTERACTIVE, AND GENERALLY PRETTY MESSY FROM JUST ABOUT ANY PERSPECTIVE. BECOMING MONKS, CLOISTERED NUNS, HERMITS, OR PRACTICING OTHER FORMS OF RENOUNCED LIVING IS NOT VERY PRACTICAL, ACHIEVABLE, NOR EVEN DESIRABLE FOR MOST OF US.

IT ALSO SEEMS UNFAIR THAT WE COULD ONLY ACHIEVE A STATE OF GRACE ON OUR DEATHBEDS WITH THE AID OF AN INTERMEDIARY. THIS SUGGESTS THAT THOSE WHO DIE UNEXPECTEDLY, OR AWAY FROM AN INTERMEDIARY, WOULD BE DENIED THIS BOON. IT ALSO IMPLIES THAT IT IS NOT POSSIBLE FOR US TO LIVE A LIFE IN A STATE OF GRACE AND STILL BE IN AND OF THE WORLD - A SOMEWHAT FORLORN AND UNHAPPY PERSPECTIVE.

IN MY MIND THIS DOES NOT MESH WITH A CREATIVE AND LOVING GOD OR A WORLD OF CREATION. IT IS INCONCEIVABLE TO IMAGINE A CREATIVE EXISTENCE UNLESS ONE EXISTS CREATIVELY; AN IMPOSSIBILITY IF ONE IS REMOVED FROM THE WORLD. SO WHAT THEN MIGHT A NON-DEATH 'STATE OF GRACE BE'? WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE IN A 'STATE OF GRACE'? IS IT POSSIBLE TO BE IN A STATE OF GRACE AND STILL BE IN AND OF THE WORLD?

ONE PART OF THE SOLUTION MIGHT BE TO DETERMINE WHAT IT IS THAT WE ARE IN THIS LIFE TO ACHIEVE. ONE THOUGHT IS THAT WE HAVE A PURPOSE, SOMETHING THAT WE ARE HERE TO DO OR LEARN. DISCOVERING THIS PURPOSE IS NOT EASY. ONCE IT IS DISCOVERED, WE MUST DEAL WITH THE LESSONS OR CONTRIBUTIONS THAT THIS CONTRACT REQUIRES. HOWEVER, FULFILLING A LIFE CONTRACT WITHIN MY DEFINITIONS WOULD NOT ACHIEVE A STATE OF GRACE.

A STATE OF GRACE OCCURS WHEN ONE IS FULFILLING ONE'S CONTRACT WHILE ACTING CONSISTENTLY AND TRULY WITH ONE'S CORE VALUES AND BELIEFS; A DUALITY THAT REQUIRES CONSCIOUS EFFORT (AS A RULE) AND MAY BE TRANSITORY IN NATURE. THAT IS - IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE TO BE ONE OR THE OTHER AT TIMES AND POSSIBLE TO BE BOTH AT TIMES. BUT IT SEEMS, ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO BE BOTH ALL THE TIME. AND THAT IS OK.

AFTER ALL, WE ARE HUMAN, CREATURES OF THIS MESSY AND COMPLICATED WORLD. IF WE WERE ABLE TO BE CONSISTENTLY IN A STATE OF GRACE WE WOULD MOST LIKELY BE IN ANOTHER STATE OR PLANE OF EXISTENCE. HOW WOULD YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE ACHIEVED A STATE OF GRACE? I SUSPECT THAT MOST PEOPLE AT SOME TIME OR ANOTHER HAVE FOUND THIS PLACE AND FAILED TO RECOGNIZE IT FOR WHAT IT WAS.

IN FAILING TO RECOGNIZE IT, THEY ARE PRONE TO DISCOUNT THE EXPERIENCE, NOT LEARN FROM IT, AND FIND IT HARDER TO HAVE THAT EXPERIENCE AGAIN. STATES OF GRACE ARE SITUATIONAL AND SPIRITUAL, NOT ENVIRONMENTAL AND PHYSICAL. YET PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF THE STATE OF GRACE ARE REAL AND VERY REWARDING. OFTENTIMES THIS STATE COMES WHEN ONE APPEARS TO BE DOING NOTHING. THAT IS - NOTHING IN THE PHYSICAL SENSE. AN EXAMPLE IS THE UNDER THE TREE EXPERIENCE.

YOU MIGHT BE SITTING UNDER A TREE IN A MEADOW ON A SULTRY SUMMER DAY, DRIFTING IN AND OUT OF WAKEFULNESS, GIVING WAY TO THE LULLABY OF THE GENTLE BREEZE IN THE LEAVES OF THE TREE SHOWERING YOU IN A GREENISH SHADE. HYPNOTIZED BY SERENITY YOU LOSE YOUR WORRIES, YOUR CARES, YOUR LOVES AND HATES, YOUR AMBITIONS AND DESIRES, JUST LIVING THE MOMENT AS A SENTIENT AND PURE HUMAN BEING. IN THAT FLEETING MOMENT, THAT TIME OF UNREAL TIME, OF SUSPENDED LIVING, YOU ARE JUST YOU IN THE

WORLD. AT THAT MOMENT YOU ARE YOUR CORE PERSON AND YOU ARE LIVING YOUR CONTRACT ON A METAPHYSICAL PLANE – THE LEVEL AT WHICH THESE CONTRACTS EXIST.

DEPENDING UPON YOUR NATURE, YOU EITHER LET THE MOMENT EXTEND OR SHAKE YOURSELF IMPATIENTLY, BEMUSED BY YOUR SUDDEN LAPSE KNOWING THAT THERE IS A WORLD OUT THERE IN WHICH YOU SHOULD BE DOING, ACTING AND CONTROLLING. UNFORTUNATELY DOING, ACTING, AND CONTROLLING SELDOM HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH STATES OF GRACE IN THIS SENSE.

THE NEXT TIME AN UNDER THE TREE EXPERIENCE OCCURS, DO NOT BE IN A HURRY. LET THE MOMENT EXTEND ITSELF. REVEL IN THE FEELING OF LAZY SERENITY. LOG IT IN YOUR CONSCIOUSNESS – ITS FEELING, YOUR EMOTIONS, FEELING THE PEACE. REMEMBER IT AND RECOGNIZE IT. PLACE IT CAREFULLY IN YOUR MIND TO RECALL AT WILL. THEN WHEN YOU ARE DOING, ACTING, OR CONTROLLING, WRAP YOURSELF IN THE FEELINGS FROM THE UNDER THE TREE EXPERIENCE.

YOUR DOING, ACTING, AND CONTROLLING WILL BEGIN TO CHANGE, BECOMING LESS HARSH AND DIRECT, HAVING MORE IMPACT AND FACILITY. YOU WILL FEEL EASIER AND MORE CONNECTED. ALLOWING THE EMOTIONS AND FEELING OF THE TREE MOMENT TO ENTER YOUR ACTIVE PHYSICAL LIFE WILL BRING A GREATER CONNECTION. NOT NECESSARILY THE PHYSICAL QUALITY IN THE SENSE OF WEALTH AND WHAT NOT; BUT THE QUALITY IN THE SENSE OF HOW THE WORLD AFFECTS YOU AND YOU HOW AFFECT THE WORLD.

BY BEING AWARE, CONSCIOUS, AND OPEN TO THE UNDER THE TREE EXPERIENCE, YOU CAN GO FROM TRANSIENT AND FLEETING EXPERIENCES OF THE STATE OF THE GRACE TO THOSE THAT ARE MORE ENDURING. THE EFFECT IS CUMULATIVE AND POSITIVE.

IF I WAS TO COMPARE THIS IDEA WITH THE MORE COMMON PLATITUDES OR SAYINGS OF SELF-DISCOVERY I MIGHT SAY THIS:

IT IS NOT THE DESTINATION.

IT IS NOT THE JOURNEY.

IT IS NOT EVEN SO MUCH AS HOW THE JOURNEY IS TRAVELED.

IT IS:

HOW YOU FEEL WHEN MAKING THE JOURNEY.

AND

WHY YOU ARE MAKING THE JOURNEY.

BUT NOTICE THAT I SAID MIGHT COMPARE.

IN MY REALITY THERE IS NO ONE WAY. EACH OF US HAS OUR OWN CONTRACT, OUR OWN CORE VALUES AND BELIEFS. IT IS FOR US AS INDIVIDUALS TO FIND THE WAY, OUR OWN STATE OF GRACE. ALL I, OR ANY OTHER PERSON CAN DO, IS SHOW SOME MARKERS AND ROAD SIGNS THAT LET YOU KNOW WHETHER OR NOT YOU ARE ON THE RIGHT PATHWAY. ACTUALLY, THAT IS ALSO NOT TRUE.

ALL ANOTHER PERSON CAN DO FOR YOU IS SHOW YOU WHAT A ROAD SIGN OR MARKER MIGHT LOOK LIKE. THEY ARE DIFFERENT FOR ALL OF US. BECOME AWARE, LOOK ABOUT YOU (THAT IS LOOK ABOUT YOURSELF), AND LISTEN TO WHAT YOUR SPIRITUAL SIDE IS TELLING YOUR LISTENING SIDE. IN TIME, YOU CAN FIND A STATE OF GRACE, HAVE PEACE, AND STILL LIVE IN AND OF THE WORLD.

HERE IS A QUOTE FROM HL JACHOWSKI, A SHAMAN OF THE INKA TRADITION. IT IS TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT, YET READILY APPLICABLE. "THE FEELING OF GRACE IS UNIQUE TO EACH PERSON, AND LIFE CHANGING. IT IS USUALLY FELT WHEN TWO OR MORE CONNECT FROM THEIR AUTHENTIC SELF. HOWEVER, IT CAN ALSO BE FELT IN TEMPORARY CROP CIRCLES OR IN PERMANENT SACRED CATHEDRALS LIKE CHARTRE OR MACHU PICCHU. GRACE IS FELT THE MOMENT WHEN ANYONE SURRENDERS THEIR EGO TO THE HOLY SPIRIT.

REMEMBER THAT IT IS THE EGO THAT FEELS SADNESS OR LONELINESS. THERE IS NONE OF THAT IN THE HEART OF THE GREAT SPIRIT. ALL IS WELL. TRUST THE SIGNS – PAY ATTENTION TO THE SIGNS. ANGELS ON EARTH COME IN ALL DIFFERENT FORMS."

