

## **WELCOMING GRACE**

**By Pierre Zimmerman**

We often think of grace or any breakthrough moment as something extraordinarily pleasant, a deep understanding when we are in a serene and safe environment. Yet often grace comes up when we are meeting some edge in our life, or we find ourselves in unusual or unfamiliar ground. Often it manifests around loss of a loved one, a job, contracting a serious illness or anything that leaves us no choice but to draw upon a capacity within ourselves that we don't know how to access otherwise.

The Buddha is a great example. He wanted answers to the unavoidable facts of birth, life, death and suffering. After many years of luxury, leaving his wife, child, engaging in renunciation, arduous spiritual practices, fasting and self-mortification, he realized he had not found any answers in his quest.

He finally sat under the bodhi tree, determined to figure it all out, and was brought to a place within himself that he didn't know how to break through. The tree is a mythic motif, which stands for the tree of life, much like the tree of immortality in the Qur'an or the tree of knowledge in the book of Genesis.

The Buddha sat under the tree at the end of his journey with the stark reality of life, a teaching in itself. When we are faced with a wall, a place inside we don't know how to navigate, a painful experience we cannot avoid, we sit down right there, at the root of the tree of life, and remain still. It is simply about being available to whatever is occurring in that moment. We are completely open, have stopped fighting against life and favor the possibility for a discovery, gaining a place of deep understanding. Grace manifests when we are able to receive it.

The images of Buddha and that of Christ with the image of the heavens opening up and the spirit of God descending as a dove are dramatic and maybe overstated, yet convey what is important about finding grace in our challenges. In those moments, life gives us a point of access, when we don't complain, avoid or explain experiences away. Something great is always waiting to emerge in the space where we open up to our limitations.

If we allow ourselves to meet challenges, not try to escape from them feeling like a victim, and instead open to the parts of our lives that are unavoidable, we can welcome grace through our most challenging experiences as our greatest gifts and revelations.

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