

Essay: The Progressive Stages of the Quest (The Working of Grace) 2.9.67
[excerpts]

... The very fact you have consciously begun the quest is itself a manifestation of Grace, ...You are not really walking alone. The very love which has awakened within you for the Overself is a reflection of the love which is being shown towards you.

... Thus the very search upon which you have embarked, the studies you are making, and the meditations you are practicing are all inspired by the Overself from the beginning and sustained by it to the end. The Overself is already at work even before you begin to seek it. Indeed you have taken to the quest in unconscious obedience to the divine prompting. And that prompting is the first movement of Grace.

The Overself is already at work even before you begin to seek it. Indeed you have taken to the quest in unconscious obedience to the divine prompting. And that prompting is the first movement of Grace. Even when you believe that you are doing these things for yourself, it is really Grace that is opening the heart and enlightening the mind from behind the scenes.

but... PB Continues...

...Only if a person falls in love with their soul as deeply as they have ever done with another person will they even stand a chance of finding it. Incessant yearning for the higher self, in a spirit of religious devotion, is one of the indispensable aspects of the fourfold integral quest. The note of yearning for this realization must sound through all the prayer and worship, concentration and meditation. ...A merely formal practice of meditation is quite insufficient although not quite useless. For without the yearning the advent of Grace is unlikely, and without Grace there can never be any realization of the Overself.

If a person has conscientiously followed this fourfold path, has practised mystical meditation and metaphysical reflection, purification of character and unselfish service, and yet seems to be remote from the goal, what are they to do? ... follow the admonition of Jesus: "Ask and ye shall receive, knock and it shall be opened unto you." They have literally to ask for Grace out of the deep anguish of their heart. We are all poor. One is indeed discerning who realizes this and becomes a beggar, imploring of God for Grace.

The factuality of Grace does not cancel out the need of moral choice and personal effort. It would be a great mistake to stamp human effort as useless in the quest and to proclaim human inability to achieve its own salvation as complete. For if it is true that Divine Grace alone can bring the quest to a successful terminus, it is likewise true that human effort must precede and thus invoke the descent of Grace.

We do not get at the Real by our own efforts alone nor does it come to us by its own volition alone. Effort that springs from the self and Grace that springs from beyond it are two things essential to success in this quest. The first we can all provide, but the second only the Overself can provide. Man was once told by someone who knew, "The Spirit bloweth where it listeth." Thus it is neither contradictory nor antithetic to say that human effort and human dependence upon Divine Grace are both needed. For there is a kind of reciprocal action between them. This reciprocal working of Grace is a beautiful fact. The subconscious invitation from the Overself begets the conscious invocation of it as an automatic response. When the ego feels attracted towards its sacred source, there is an equivalent attraction on the Overself's part towards the ego itself. Never doubt that the Divine always reciprocates this attraction to it of the human self. Neither the latter's past history nor present character can alter that blessed hope-bringing fact. Grace is the final, glorious, and authentic proof that it is not only man that is seeking God, but also God that is ever waiting for man.

Our initiative pushes on toward the goal, whilst divine Grace draws us to it. Both forces must combine if the process is to be completed and crowned with success. Yet that which originally made the goal attractive and inspired with faith in it and thus gave rise to efforts, was itself the Grace. In this sense Paul's words, "For by Grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves," become more intelligible. ...

... What is needed to call down Grace is, first, a humility that is utter and complete, deeply earnest and absolutely sincere, secondly, an offering of self to the Overself, a dedication of earthly being to spiritual essence, and, thirdly, a daily practice of devotional exercise. The practices will eventually yield experiences, the aspirations will eventually bring assistance.... 2.9.67 [*+Instructions for Spiritual Living*]