

## **GRACE WILL LEAD ME HOME**

**By Judy Chang**

**January 28, 2007**

One of the many hats I wear is “Minister” and, by the “authority vested in me, according to the Laws of New York”, I perform wedding ceremonies. I can assure you, while growing up, my parents and I never entertained this possibility. My Dad, who had far more faith in the logic and power of science and philosophy, and my Mom, who came out of Catholic school in Shanghai, would have been horrified if I had told them when I grow up I will become a Minister. Nevertheless, they are now quite happy to call upon me to say grace at dinner. A few years ago, in the splendor of glorious autumn colors, after I had finished a ceremony, some parts in Chinese, I was approached by the grandmother, who reminded me of my grandmother, wise, warm, welcoming. She said wistfully, "Would you please say grace and give me a blessing?"

Say grace and give me a blessing.

Her request echoed what I imagine, deep within us, we all wish for: “We want to be blessed.” And in our better moments, we want to be a blessing for others.

How do we go about fulfilling this wish? Where can I find grace? During the recent stretch of rough sailing at All Souls, I earnestly sought calm. I look to the universe, to the world around me, to each other, and to the invisible world of the sacred, to be reassured that life is my friend and my champion, that we all belong in this home.

Home where our hurts are comforted, our fears allayed, our joys amplified, our dreams given wing, our loneliness banished and our stomachs filled. Home where we are understood, embraced and completely accepted. We all want to be home.

Say grace and give me a blessing.

Have you ever been at dinner when someone asked, “Who would like to say grace?” Now that I have “come out” as a Minister, that question is often directed to me. In the past, before people knew I was a Minister, that question is often followed by a moment of uncomfortable silence. If the question had been, “Would anyone like to say a few words before we eat?” there would have been more volunteers. What is it about saying grace that makes a person feel uncomfortable?

I've said grace many times and given many blessings. I have blessed the birds and the bees and the flowers and the trees. I have said grace over a newly consecrated home and a demolished house. I have blessed cats and dogs and tuna fish and beef with broccoli. I

have given thank for heavenly music and glorious sunsets. I have blessed babies and octogenarians. I have said grace over arrival of new events and departure of souls. I have said grace over harvest of plenty and loss of cherished memories. Still, each time, I feel huge trepidation when I am called upon to say grace and give blessings. Couldn't someone else do it? Someone more appropriate, more fitting than I? Who am I, to say grace?

Say grace and give me a blessing.

We can all do this.

I feel each of us has an indwelling spirit / Buddha nature / the Light that shines from within us / a unique and personal connection with the sacred, which is our true teacher. Recently when I was feeling powerless, helpless, limited, in the rough seas of All Souls, I thought it would be best for me to seclude myself and invite the teacher to come.

I did Open House. I opened my heart, I opened my being. I invited the grace, Universal Energy, sun energy, moon energy, stars energy, animal energy, human energy, tree energy, rock energy, river energy, to come to me. When you're confronted by some kind of problem and are feeling exiled from yourself, you can hold Open House. That is, open up your heart.

Do not feel, "Who am I, just a small individual, I am not capable of doing such a thing." Seclude yourself and do Open House and invite – cordially invite – grace to visit you. Amazingly, you will gradually feel that you are more than you think you are. You can do more than you think you can.

Say grace and give me a blessing.

A blessing is the natural expression of the passionate love and inclusiveness of our inner spirit. It is the visible flame of that fire within us, and each of us can be its hearth. To say grace and give a blessing is the manifestation of grace, invisible and all present, coming through you. It is a natural human ability, and anyone can do it. But first we must claim that ability.

Say grace and give me a blessing.

As Unitarian Universalists, we are quite comfortable if someone comes to us and says, "Please help me." We jump right in. We would know how to proceed. We would ask what they need or wish, and see if we have the resources or willingness to help. However, how do we feel, what would we do, if we were asked to say grace and give a blessing? To do so means admitting that we have access to a spiritual source capable of making that blessing real.

There is holiness within us.

I know my Dad would be terribly uncomfortable with this idea. He, like many of us, would be uncomfortable to identify himself as spirit, connected to the Greater Spirit.

It is no longer a “natural” part of our lives to walk by the field and sincerely call forth blessings upon the land and the crops. We can easily call someone millions of miles away to speak with them – by cell phone, and even to see them, via video conferencing. Yet we are uncomfortable and find it difficult to call upon our creative spirit within. What a paradox, we can connect with each other in such incredible way, and we are disconnected to ourselves. This disconnection is what I experienced as the voice within us that longs to call the universe home.

Say grace and give me a blessing.

When I arrived in Canada at the age of 11, I did not speak a word of English, and felt deaf, mute and stupid. Deaf because I didn't understand what the people around me were saying, mute because I could not come up with words to tell them what I wish them to know and stupid, because I was put back a year in school. In learning to gain entrance into a foreign world, to be at home, I worked hard and learned to pick up signs from beyond “just words”.

Grace is like that, beyond “just words”. We speak words and we identify ourselves by our roles, by what is visible: tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor . . . or by our possession, or our social status. We rarely identify ourselves by what is invisible, “I am soul. There is holiness in me. Therefore, I am someone who can say grace and give blessings.”

A wise man once wrote,

. . . “Blessing is spirit reminding itself of who it is in the midst of its myriad incarnations and manifestations. Blessing is a conversation of recognition between myself, and myself within another. Blessing is a reminder of the love that lies at the core of us, waiting to become our blood and sinew, bone and tissue. If in the "new physics" and the "new cosmology" the stars remind us that we ourselves are made of "star stuff" and therefore kin to the universe, then in a new, holistic spirituality, blessings remind us that we are made of spirit stuff, soul stuff, love stuff --- "blessing stuff" --- and therefore kin to life and to each other. When we bless, we are not just doing good. We are remembering this.”

Say grace and give me a blessing.

In addition,

. . . “A blessing has nothing to do with esoteric or spiritual pyrotechnics. It is a whisper, a gentleness, a voice that speaks not of my power but of the power within the recipient. It is not a hurricane of energy but a soft and warming

breeze that invites us to open windows and doors to let stuffiness out and new life in. It is an invitation to openness. It is not meant to impress but to touch and to connect. It could take whatever form would make that connection. Whatever spiritual forces might flow within a blessing, what is most needed is simple human caring and presence, a mindfulness of being present to the other. A blessing is a two-way street: not something someone does for someone else, but something we become together in order that a spirit may flow. The principle is deceptively simple but very familiar: Where two or more are gathered in the name of that which loves, that which connects, that which is compassionate, that which liberates, there blessing is also.”

"Say grace and give me a blessing," grandmother said. She looked at me with such trust and understanding, encouraging without words. The air between us shimmered with palpable knowing and warmth. I didn't know what to say. I held her hands, closed my eyes, breathed into the deep stillness, breathing with her, we hug in spirit.

For the moments we held and embrace, we were also filled and surrounded by a gentle sweetness that is simple, unique and endless. I can feel its tingling and flow from me to her and back again. Nothing special. Just as it is. Just being together, two people hugging and bowing to each other, recognizing our humanness, our Buddha nature, and gathered in the presence of the sacred that becomes visible when human beings welcome each other to their hearts in gladness and grace.

We opened our eyes and smiled at each other. She simply said, "Thank you," gathered up her things, and walked away.

That was it.

She may have asked me for the blessing, but I was the one who was blessed.

Say grace and give me a blessing.

My friends Barbara and David are parents of triplets. Katie, Taryn and Hugh are now almost teenagers. When they were toddlers, I was often invited to be the “third adult” so there would be a ratio of one adult to one child. This way, we could each hold the hand of one child as we walked (or ran along) the streets of NY City on our way to the parks.

Once we arrived at the playground, they would immediately run away from us, to explore the world. After testing out the swing, climbing the monkey bars, they would come back, to be reassured that we were still there. Then they would be off again. Then they would come back again and reconnect. As they become older, the exploration would become wider and the time between moments of reconnections longer. The need for reassurance took on different forms but the cycle continued.

I see grace and blessing as such moments of reconnection with each other, with the world, and with the source of our being. I sense, for myself, and in our world, a desire for such a connection. We all want to be blessed and we want to be home. From our hearts we ask: Say grace and give me a blessing.

Each of us, you and I, can answer that request. We are the points of reconnection, points of remembrance, points of love. We can say grace and give blessings.

Say grace and give me a blessing!

Yes, I will.