

What is “Grace?”

Sabine Lichtenfels

The pilgrimage will lead us to Israel-Palestine, the so-called Holy Land, a region which has been dominated by war, conflict, struggle and division for a long time.

If this pilgrimage is to be a success in terms of inner and outer peacemaking, then a spiritual source will be needed. This will help us, as pilgrims, to act in both a correct and healing way despite any difficult situations. In search of a name for the pilgrimage we came across the term “grace.” “Grace” has many connotations and in English comprises more than the word “Gnade” does in German.



Grace means mercy, charm, sweetness, readiness to serve, charity, consideration, congeniality and also stands for the act of Grace itself.

Grace reminds me of walking in service for a higher mission, in service for life and its inherent justice.

Those who are walking in the name of Grace do not come to accuse. They do not come to impart a new ideology to a country or a land and its people – they come in the service of openness, of perception and of support.

Grace pledges to end war wherever it happens to be. In the name of Grace, I am always on the lookout for a nonviolent solution, a solution which creates justice and healing among all concerned. Often clear judgment is necessary to do this, but never condemnation.

Grace says: “I am willing to end the war and to understand the means by which it can be ended. I place myself in the service of a solution.”

You can easily examine just how far you have committed yourself to act in this way by the way you react, especially when you feel that someone has tried to hurt you or treated you unjustly. In such situations we are quick to forget our determination to live in peace and readily enter into disputes and wars, large or small.

Here is a small example, perhaps a little humorous, but it makes the point. If you hear that the car of a distant acquaintance has been stolen, you will probably take the news very calmly. If you hear that your best friend’s car has been stolen, you will probably get a bit agitated but still stay cool enough to only pass on a few words of commiseration. When, however, your own beloved car has been stolen, inner peace is shattered – perhaps for some time. The way we behave is often decided at deeper levels of consciousness. We can, however, understand more about the correlations to actions on a large scale when we have learned to become witnesses to ourselves on the smaller scale.

Grace is not man-made.

Grace always refers us to a higher level of life’s order and organization.

It is not myself that judges, but rather life itself.

No matter where I happen to be and where I am going, I put aside all prejudice and judgment.

I do not arrive with preconceived ideas of who the other one might or might not be and I do not make these opinions the yardstick for my actions.

I practiced and learned to see the Christ in every human being wherever I was throughout the pilgrimage.

To do this, at first I turn to the human being who happens to be my counterpart and let myself be touched by their history. To do this, I anchor myself as far as possible in the present moment. Again and again I imagine that the person sitting in front of me could just as well be me. I could be a female settler, a Palestinian woman or a young Israeli woman about to enter the military. I could be the soldier who just shot tear gas at Palestinian kids. I look for the core of the human being in all its roles and behind its masks of alienation. It is often difficult to be in this kind of presence. How often have I been outraged about the ideologies which I had to endure listening to, for instance from an extremist rabbi or a fanatical Muslim? And how often did I feel an inner defensiveness or a reaction of disgust when listening to the never-ending accusations and stories of suffering from the Palestinians in the West Bank or to the fanatical speeches of the settlers?

Grace demands self-knowledge. And self-knowledge is not always easy. To discover flaws in others is much more pleasant and easy than to unmask oneself. Everything within me wants to cry out in anger and outrage when I sit opposite a young officer, listening to his excited explanations about the ideological values of his country.

All of a sudden it occurs to me that he could just as well be my son – immediately I begin to see in him not only the soldier but the human being behind his role. This is the first step which creates an opening. Now everything depends on whether I will be able to tell him the truth of what I see without any fear.

This is where Grace occurs.

I let myself be touched and I try to touch others. Whenever possible, I enter places with my heart open. This was the case when I met with soldiers and officers, Palestinian peasants and farmers, and Israeli settlers.

Grace comes from strength and connectedness with the source of life.

This must not be confused with a timid attitude where I dare not speak up against injustice when I see it.

I do not condemn anyone or anything when I am in the state of Grace, rather, I gather the courage to speak the truth. I want to speak the truth in such a way that it reaches out to others and changes the other, and not in order to be right – which would result in waging war. In our everyday reality we shut out both sides. We shut out the truth of the victim as well as the truth of the perpetrator. We are then quick to impose our worldview on either one of them. And most important of all is that our worldview is the right one! We do this to protect ourselves from being touched. We can only bear to watch the constant and terrible news because we are so closed. And we are relieved when we are able to distinguish the good guys from the bad guys. We carry on living our comfortable daily

lives and believe that we are good people when we manage to show a little charity in our lives. This is how the subtle fascism of our time emerges – through indifference.

People shut their good middle-class front doors in the face of reality. They do it until suddenly they themselves are caught by a wave of real life which until then they have been successfully suppressing. Suppression now strikes back and shows its most cruel and violent side. It is not life itself that is cruel. It is through suppression that life appears to be cruel and violent. We see this in marriage crises, in illness, in growing suicide rates, in psychological sickness, alcoholism and other similar problems. That is until we wake up!

Grace reminds us of another truth and reality at work behind the terrible dimensions of a culture which will soon have exhausted its last resources. The truth is simple and the same everywhere.

When forming an opinion, we tend to forget that we do this mainly from a level of interpretation. The truth lies beyond all opinions. The truth is distinct from ideology in as much as truth is both simple and true.

I was shocked to realize that conflicts, more often than not, are kindled and rekindled by the ideologies and convictions that people continually fire at each other. Because of our fear of the truth of life we consider our opinions and views to be true and defend them until the bitter end. This is psychological warfare that finally results in real war. We hold to be true that which has nothing to do with truth. This is the story of socialization we identify with.

All of a sudden you look into the distorted mirror of humankind, which has separated itself from its roots. You look at the same patterns of fear, anger, powerlessness and trauma, which are everywhere, and at the resulting war with its destructive acts of revenge. It is suppressed life itself that chooses revenge in order to survive.

At this point, appeals to morality are useless. Just imagine – your child is killed in front of your own eyes. Is not revenge your foremost and strongest impulse?

You see it everywhere, in greater or lesser forms, but the basic pattern remains identical everywhere. It can be found behind every ideology, behind all religions, behind all worldviews. We have, in equal measure, all become victims of an imperialistic culture. Behind this avalanche that rolls across the regions of war on this planet, writing its painful history of victims and perpetrators, behind all this, you suddenly come across the same hunger everywhere – a hunger for life, a hunger for love, a hunger for trust and belonging, a hunger for acknowledgement and a hunger for wanting to be seen and understood. This hunger is independent of any culture. It simply exists in every human being, as truly as s/he still remains human.

When I am out there in the name of Grace, I try to meet the human being and let myself be touched by them rather than by the worldviews they represent.

All was lost whenever our meetings started with a debate about worldviews. Nobody listened anymore and instead, an emotional upheaval ensued. The meetings unfolded in a completely different way whenever people were touched by each other on a human level.

Grace always reminds you of this.

Grace is like a consciously chosen naivety that helps you not get lost in the ocean of worldviews so that you recognize and protect the elementary and simple truth behind all things. You create an opening for the cry for life.

You see the collective body of pain in front of you, this body that has presented the Jews with their terrible fate. You equally recognize the collective delusion of the German people who have still not been able to truly look at and heal their past. You see the effects of a patriarchal religion and culture which has taken a wrong turn for thousands of years, and you see how war is an inseparable part of it, just as much as thunder and lightning are part of a stormy night.

The history of victims and perpetrators and our identification with either one of them has to come to an end. At this point, world history awaits a big transformation, the final awakening!

Grace always reminds you that this change does not happen through one's own power.

Grace reminds you of the sacredness of life at every moment.

Grace reminds you that the only way out of the dead end street is for humankind to successfully return to a basis of life and love, of trust and truth.

Grace sees a new dawn at the horizon of history, a paradise of love and compassion, a culture honoring variety while at the same time acknowledging the universal values of life.

Grace is the umbilical cord that connects us to this vision and guides us, in this moment, to act and behave out of its spirit, its freshness, abundance and beauty.

This was an edited excerpt from the book [Grace: Pilgrimage for a Future Without War](#) by [Sabine Lichtenfels](#).