

# Karma and grace

THE EVENTS  
THAT BEFALL  
US ARE DETER-  
MINED BY  
KARMA BUT  
THEIR TIMING  
AND THE  
CIRCUMSTANCES  
WE ARE PLACED  
IN, ARE  
DETERMINED  
BY GRACE

by Suma Varughese



Suma Varughese is  
Editor-in-Chief of *Life Positive*.  
Write to her at  
suma@lifepositive.net

A long time back, a reader asked me a tricky question. If everything happened according to our karmic merit, what role did grace play?

I was stumped. I honestly did not know. However, as my karma has been working itself out over the last so many years, the answer gradually became clear to me. Whatever happens to us is through karma, but the time it happens to us and the circumstances in which we are positioned are determined by grace.

If I look back, things have happened to me only when I was in a position to bear them, and even put them to good use. For a long time, soon after I entered the path, I was extremely low on energy for all of it went in becoming aware and coming to terms with the inner world. At that time, I was cosseted like a baby, and spared of almost any challenges in the outside world. A scaffolding had been built around me to keep me safe at a time when I really could not have borne any external difficulties. There were few people I had to interact with, and all of them were pleasant and loving. Both at work and home, I was surrounded by competent, capable folk who more than offset my own lethargy and lassitude.

Gradually, as I became more able and capable of standing on my own two feet, the scaffolding began to be lifted and I was exposed to some hard challenges. The first was a serious illness that my sister sustained and that required me to look after her for close to six months. Many years before, I had fallen severely ill and my sister had manfully nursed me back to health. Clearly, her illness was karmic payback time for me, but how lovingly grace had arranged it for me to pay back only when I was ready to do so.

My sister's illness proved to be a blessing in more ways than one, for she moved in with us for close to two years, and took charge of the house and our mother. This was crucial because

life had thrown me yet another challenge – the editing of this magazine. I could never have managed it without her help for it entailed working long hours every day. And when I returned home, there was my sister, waiting for me with a delicious hot meal! How lucky I felt.

After two years, the rug was jerked a little more when my sister went back to her house and I now had to grow in capability to handle the job, the house and my mother! And I did! The timing was perfect as always.

My most recent challenge has been the resurgence of rheumatoid arthritis, which is a condition I contracted more than 17 years ago and had been lying dormant since. Why was I spared this affliction for such a long time when most of those who get it are severely affected within five years? Surely only grace? And the fact that it has come up now proves to me that I am ready to handle its challenges and perhaps even release it from my system.

Providence seems to watch over me, releasing bits and pieces of my karma as and when I develop the capability to handle it. I don't know how much more karmic retribution lies ahead of me, but I do know that it will come to me only when I'm ready, so why worry? Nor is this phenomenon restricted to me. Almost everyone I spoke to agreed that whenever a challenge was thrown at them they were also provided with the support to meet it. Either they were miraculously helped by others or they found the strength within to cope. I think Dada Vaswani has also mentioned that when God sends us problems he also sends us the strength to overcome it. What is this but grace?

I have also been told by many authorities that the difference between the karma we earn and what is actually visited upon us is huge. A lot of it is commuted by grace. So let's not forget that divine justice goes hand in hand with divine grace. ☺