



# mindset

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## miracles

**O**n the bookshelf next to my desk I have a picture and quote sent by a friend. The black and white, grainy photo is of an infant, beautiful and perfectly formed, but so tiny that she is being held in the palms of a man's hands. The quote underneath the photo is from Albert Einstein and reads: "There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle and the other is as though everything is a miracle." I think it would be difficult to see the photo of the tiny infant and not be filled with awe at both the miracle of life and the skill that enables us to help such tiny premature infants survive. However, in the bustle of our daily lives it is easy to lose sight of the presence of the miracles that surround us, the spectacular wonders in our own backyards.

There are moments, however, when our worlds open up and we feel acutely aware of the miraculous nature of life. I think of these as moments of grace, and they can occur both in the context of joy as well as in the darkest of times. We have all probably experienced such feelings around the birth of a child, in the presence of a loved one, in moments of passion, or listening to a beautiful piece of music. As we are filled with good feelings we intimately experience our connection to the world around us and become acutely aware of the wonder and miracle of life. These moments of grace are welcome any time, but when they occur in times of grave physical danger or emotional trauma they seem even more miraculous.

One of the first times I can remember such an experience was after the death of my father. I was a graduate student in my mid-twenties and living in Tennessee, a 20-hour drive from my parents' home in Texas. Because of financial constraints a friend and I drove back to Texas. Somewhere in the middle of the night in Oklahoma I felt tremendous anxiety and the need to be home immediately. We were in a small town with a tiny airport and of course there were no flights available. I was forced to sit with this terrible feeling. Sometime during the course of that very long night I suddenly found myself feeling calm and at peace. I had a feeling of connection with the universe and an understanding that birth and death were part of the natural cycle of existence and that everything would be okay. Over the

course of the days, weeks and even months afterwards I had a profound appreciation of the importance of relationships above anything else and solid knowledge of my priorities.

I have experienced this sense of grace at other difficult times as well. Several years ago I was dealing with a sense of outrage at someone, anger that I felt was totally justifiable, but which was extremely disruptive. I remember feeling consumed at one point and simply saying to myself, "I can't do this." I didn't really know what "this" was, but I gave up and recognized my helplessness to do anything constructive. Almost immediately a feeling of peace and well-being washed over me, and what was most amazing, a sense of love and compassion for the other person. While the anger did come back from time to time after that it was much more muted and I was able to easily cope with it.

Most of us have this experience of awe when we witness the miracle of birth, but it can also be present at the time of death if we are open and fully present. A number of years ago, I was privileged to be present at a stillbirth. While it was unspeakably sad, the birth and the child were still miraculous.

To die well is a miracle and to witness it is a miracle as well. In May, I was able to briefly be with a childhood friend who was dying of breast cancer. Nancy was full of humor and kindness until the end. She was still thinking about others and offering support to them. Nancy was a very spiritual person and was sure that her connections to those she left and with those who had gone before would remain.

As I think of these experiences, what is common to them all is a breakthrough in my normal awareness to a broader realm of consciousness. Sometimes that breakthrough can be due to something extraordinarily beautiful and sometimes it can be because of something so devastating that it causes us to give up our tight individual illusions of control. At those moments of grace we enter into the awareness of the connection of all life. We recognize the underlying love and support and know that no matter what happens we know we can be okay. For me it is the experience of being held as the Psalm describes, in the palm of God's hands. Perhaps that is the best miracle of all. *h&h*