



**NAVARATHRI 2008**

## SANKALPAM

Some things never change.  
Every year, I sit here on a night with no moon  
and start a journey from despair and anxiety  
towards grace.

The journey lasts ten days.  
And words beyond what I care to count.

At the end of that journey  
I do not find grace  
but remember where it is –  
somewhere in my own heart.

It's a long journey to this point of departure.  
My self.  
My heart.  
My being.

And it's the same journey every year,  
with some thematic variations.

But I do not really learn.

Just this minute, my brain is dictating these words  
that my fingers are typing  
even as my neck hurts with anxiety  
about the grace  
my heart is rummaging for

amid the lists and losses  
and uncertainties of this moment.

And so in this moment,  
I resolve, like I do every year,  
to seek grace, your grace, my grace.  
But this year, I will look for it  
where I have known it most surely.

And this year, I will not ask you,  
are you coming with me?  
Because this year, I will know that where you are,  
I am. Where I am,  
you are.  
And that is grace.

Mahalaya Amavasya  
September 28, 2008

## PRATHAMAM

Like the special effects of a mythological spectacular,  
I know your grace first as my mother and  
then in the sure cradle of my father's arms,  
but these then dissolve into a benevolent universe  
where scores of people play mother and father to me  
at different moments.

In a world that is not always kind and nurturing,  
nor even simply safe,  
I know their care and protection  
in places where my parents are not.

But let's start with my parents who first express your grace to me.  
My mother, in her graceful and gracious way, teaches me  
about the world and its cares,  
what is right and what is wrong,  
the right way to do something and the other ways it could be done.  
My mother, particular and perfectionist, patient pedagogue,  
meticulous nurse, sober aesthete and creative spirit,  
and storyteller of unexpectedly wicked wit.  
My father, sparing with words and generous in all other matters,  
expressive in his moments, expansive always,  
practical and imaginative, quick to anger but quicker to trust.  
My father, with a heart that was lion and butter all at once,  
hands always open to give and ready to hold,  
willing to work, able to animate  
and daring to make dreams come true.  
My mother and father express your grace to me

but show me that grace lies in giving.

And then my readymade army of mothers and fathers,  
my aunts and uncles,  
each a distinctive manifestation of your grace in my life.  
Like refracted images of my parents,  
remembering what I liked to eat,  
remembering small things about me,  
inciting me to new adventures of the mind,  
encouraging me to have a worldview all my own,  
taking the time to hear what it is,  
welcoming me to the home that is their heart,  
teaching me to sing, taking pleasure in my song,  
looking at me and seeing their child.  
Your grace, this family of a thousand special talents,  
all merging into the glow of its unmatched warmth  
and all weaving quickly a safety net of support for me,  
at all times. Your grace, this sheltering tree of a family.

And then by yet another sleight-of-hand,  
the aunts and uncles of my childhood,  
the parents of my friends.  
Recipes and life-lessons, culture and politics,  
conversations for a lifetime.  
Your grace, their affection and indulgence  
experienced as warm welcomes,  
attention to small needs, acts of inclusion  
when I was alone and it was cold and scary.

And now I am grown up, but wherever I am,  
I look for your grace and I find it  
in a mother who looks at me and sees a daughter,  
her daughter, someone else's. A daughter.  
And I find it in a father who thinks,  
my daughter would say this,  
or her father would do that.  
I find your grace in that moment where I am  
with someone who wants to look after me.

In the love and care I receive,  
in the security I feel,  
I know your grace as surely as I have  
in the lap of my mother or  
holding the strong hand of my father.

You are my mother,  
mother of the world,  
and your grace is mamata,  
the love of a parent for a child.  
When I close my eyes and say,  
Amma, I feel your presence,  
as touch, as calm, as breath,  
I know your grace.

September 30, 2009

## DWITIYAI

In the friendship of companions, your grace  
is lighthearted laughter, rock-solid support  
and long weepy funk sessions.

The gift of this grace is  
finding friends,  
making friends,  
enjoying friends,  
keeping friends,  
being friends.

Friends are like air, found everywhere.

And my first friends are family.

Cousin sisters and cousin brothers,  
playing with me, delighting in me,  
storing up stories to embarrass me with,  
indulging me, watching over me,  
becoming my mentors, becoming my friends,  
forming the lyrics of the first songs I wrote,  
allowing me to follow, allowing me to lead,  
making it safe for me to be me,  
to try being me, just a little for size,  
and then with ever-greater confidence.  
My sisters and brothers, anchors of my self,  
touchstones and yardsticks for my life.

My best friends, I called them,  
and they are three, born right before me.  
With them, I have learnt  
that friendship is about words and music,  
that friendship needs no words or music,  
and that friendship is the opportunity to write a new song.  
Like the mounts on a carousel,  
we journey together,  
sometimes coming close, sometimes moving away,  
and me, the youngest by weeks,  
always sure the other three are along for the entire ride,  
as reassurance and reinforcement for all my choices.

My sister, born on a day of my choosing,  
someone for me to watch over,  
became someone to watch over me.  
Quicksilver but focused, intensely loyal and innately social,  
sometimes child, sometimes student,  
sometimes boss, sometimes teacher,  
sometimes life-mechanic, sometimes co-worker,  
she gives me the confidence to paint in bright colours.  
Painting with her, is another friend of mine,  
who has taught us all to celebrate every moment  
as it comes. Joy is in the small things,  
the daub of colour on a grey day,  
a piece of chocolate, the shared abandon of a family board game.

Shared excitement, shared pleasures, shared struggles.  
These sisters and brothers of mine  
who can go from philosophy to bad jokes,

get serious about humour and keep perspective on challenges,  
who disappear in peacetime but materialize in times of crisis,  
who can sing like nightingales and larks  
in the absence of an audience,  
who allow me to walk with them as they walk with me,  
who are blessed with words, colours, music and  
above all, the gift of love,  
express your grace to me  
with their unfailing, unflagging friendship,  
teaching me the most useful of all life-skills – friendship.

September 30, 2008

## TRITIYAI

Some days I sit by myself  
a speck caught in a typhoon  
a small raft tossing around a turbulent ocean  
a penny sinking weightlessly into a black hole  
a heart full of worry that cannot find words  
nor a person who will listen to them.  
Some days I miss my friends.

Someone  
who knows the everyday business of your life,  
who knows from the way you are standing  
that this has not been a good day,  
who knows from your shifty glance  
that you are trying not to laugh and even better  
what it is that makes you giggle,  
who tells you when something good happens to her,  
who thinks of you when the day has just been ghastly,  
who knows you care and who cares about you  
enough for conversation without preliminaries,  
for whom there is no substitute in the whole world.

In my life, there is such an abundance of grace,  
that I have known true friendship,  
not once, or twice, but in every moment of my life.  
Today when I remind myself of that,  
I am overawed by this abundance which means  
that I cannot recall every single person who is my friend.

The girl who walked back and forth with me,  
as we escorted each other home in an endless loop.  
The girl with whom I had a pact to write the same word  
at the same time in the same way.  
The girls with whom I played house in the corridor between our  
flats.  
The girls with whom I first went for walks and long talks.

And then friendships and life began to be about serious stuff.  
Crises, angst, rivalry, political strategy and solidarity.  
We kept secrets, we kept vigil, we kept together.  
And like water seeping through walls,  
there were books, words, laughter, music,  
irony and dreams to keep us going.  
They still do. That is your grace.

I treasure friendships because I have also known loneliness.  
I have known alienation.  
I have known what it is to not fit in.  
I still do.  
On good days, I accept these as your grace as well.  
They stoke the fire in my belly.  
They keep me focused.  
They make me creative and they sharpen my expression.

On other days, I miss the friends of my adult years.  
We have shared work,  
we have shared stolen moments of leisure from work.  
We have been colleagues,  
we have been conspirators in turning work into play  
and play into opportunities for creativity.  
We have exulted in each other's successes,  
owned each other's celebrations as our own.  
We have entered into each other's crises,  
becoming pillars, walls, foundations for each other.  
We have chided, like teachers,  
and indulged, like parents.  
I know that wherever they are  
they know I am writing this. And missing them.

On most days, I miss these people,  
scattered like your grace in every corner of the world.  
connecting, re-connecting through every device  
and platform possible to make up for geographical distance.

I miss them, but I am so grateful for your grace  
that brings them to my life.  
For what is it but grace, that brings humans  
born in different corners of the world,  
different settings, different communities,  
together, to interact and form these unbreakable bonds  
with each other?

Your grace in my life –  
the gifts of friendship  
without borders  
and understanding  
without words  
and love  
without reason.

October 1, 2008



## CHATURTI

Today my brain has been like a foggy tunnel.

There are many things I don't understand  
about the way grace works.  
(I do understand that figuring them out  
is the purpose of life.)

You gifted me grasp and intelligence.  
But it has never been important to me  
to prove that relative to anyone else.

You gave me voice  
--to sing, to speak, to write—  
but filled me with enough reticence  
and then an appreciation for silence,  
that let me cede my turn  
over and over.

You gave me a comfortable life as a child  
and then you challenged me.  
painfully, at times, traumatically, as an adult.  
But you never filled me with enough desire  
to earn or acquire numbers I cannot write.

You filled my life with people.  
And you filled me with devotion to them.  
When they were snide or cruel,  
and they were, you peeled away my aura-armour

and let me feel hurt.  
You could have let me be as I was.  
But I had to feel anger, hurt, resentment.

You have blessed me with so much skill  
and enough charisma,  
even I must embarrassingly concede,  
you improve my odds of success at anything.  
The ambitions and dreams you have stoked  
are of being useful, of giving and giving back.  
Both then you make each task hard,  
harder, still harder, unbearable.  
Everything takes long  
and I am always fighting alone.

Or rather, you place me in a universe  
that is crowded with helpful people,  
and you endow me with an appreciative nature,  
but I always feel alone.  
Alone, alienated, isolated, lone-ranger,  
Don Quixote, maverick, eccentric, all by myself,  
alone.

Why?

Why waste my time on  
elaborating these contradictions,  
sorting through the maze they forge?

You have an agenda.  
You have created an able instrument.  
Why not let things happen?  
Why can that not be your grace?

Why must it be instead that  
I have to breathe evenly,  
pay attention to each of these ironies,  
fathom the curriculum you have designed for my life  
and study it deeply, by myself?  
Why does your grace not take the form of revelation,  
or at least, study guide?

I really don't understand this today.  
As I write, I am overwhelmed  
by a sense of my limitations  
and my mind wonders how anything will get done.  
But somewhere in this mess,  
my heart tells me, is.... your grace.

October 2, 2008.

## PANCHAMI

Grace is the light at the end of the tunnel.

The road winds dramatically and the ascent is steep,  
but at the end of a ride that has challenged your stomach  
to the limits of its tolerance,  
grace is the glimpse of light  
through which you see the forested hills you love,  
the ocean you have missed.

Waiting for parents to come take you home  
long after most of your friends have gone,  
grace is the glimpse of your father  
approaching the school gate.

Grace is the friend's sister who gets off the bus with you  
because you cannot cross the road by yourself.  
Grace is the school teacher who seats you at her dining-table  
to teach you quadratic equations.

The kind and understanding vice-principal  
who lets you sit with her and take time off from college  
because she knows your struggle before you do,  
is grace.

Grace is found in the mundane things that go your way.  
Someone cleans the train bathroom just before you use it.  
You step out of your gate and an auto steps before you.  
The car pulls into the garage

as someone vacates the spot you like best.  
But the experience of grace is more tangible  
when you have waited long for a breakthrough  
and then it happens as easily as breath.

Grace is reading parts of your own dissertation  
a decade after the life-death struggle with it ended in your favour  
to realise you did a good job after all.  
When your tired spirit and your ill-used body  
show the first signs of recovery,  
grace is like sunshine you cannot miss.

Those who accept your rough edges  
and the spillover of your inner struggles  
and the workings of the uncontrollable centrifuge of vitriol within  
you,  
and still stay in your orbit  
are nothing less than fragrant fragments of grace.

For October 4, 2008/ Written October 5, 2008

## SHASHTI

Grace is also the tunnel itself  
and the discovery of the unexpected pleasures  
of the darkness  
as well as the unanticipated gifts of the journey.

Many, most, almost all  
of these gifts are friends.

Such as the friend you made on a train out of the city  
and kept for decades after that.  
Such as the friends that you make while taking an exam  
at a dilapidated centre in the heart of town.  
Such as the friends you made on job interviews  
who don't forget you even when the outcome favours another.

The hardest moments of a journey are sprinkled with grace.  
Students who greet you like family and  
worry about your future like friends.  
New friends who pray and comfort and take care of you  
as you take care of your crisis.  
Old friends who make calls and call favours.  
Friends you don't know  
whose written words reach you when you need to hear them.

Grace is like the cycle of tides.  
Good energy that washes over you  
and washes you to the magical shore  
you barely imagined.

Friends who enter, disappear, re-enter to vanish again  
in order to enable you in one moment.  
You can look at them drifting away again  
or you can look gratefully at where they helped you reach.

Grace is the experience of enough scarcity  
to understand abundance as a state of mind.  
Penny-pinching to the point of surrender  
and finding that someone up there does arrange  
to take care of your bills.  
Not more, not less, but just what you need.  
The confidence to start doing something  
knowing it will get paid for.  
Contentment with the realization of value—  
above all, mine.

Being true to yourself when it is hard  
is grace.  
Finding those who will stand by you  
on the uncomfortable moral high ground  
is nothing less than grace.  
Grace is not knowing enough to know  
you are going to pay for what you say  
so that you can say it anyway. And it is  
not changing your mind once you know.  
To be able to take the consequences  
and to read their true lessons,  
however haltingly, is grace.

Grace is the discipline to delay gratification  
without resentment.

It is finding delight in small things  
while the big ones are elusive.

Grace is noticing that spring is beautiful  
even when your own summer is uncertain.

You become grace on the rare instances  
that past and future completely slip your mind...

On a windy cliff by an ocean full of stories,  
staying grounded against the gale-like forces  
working to fly you across.

In that space where you slip into meditation  
and out of your body for just long enough  
to know you are. You are. Just now.

Grace is what is left when you weed out  
feeling, thinking, having an opinion,  
asserting yourself, cowering,  
everything else.

Grace is the inappropriately timed escaping giggle.

The exquisitely worded appeal that you hear  
yourself speaking.

It is the honesty of your incoherent-feeling representation  
that grace allows people to hear over your grammar  
or the perfection of your rhetoric.

Grace is that moment when pain lifts  
from a migraine-ravaged body.

When the practice of conscious breathing

stems nausea that threatens to evacuate your insides.

It is that day when your energy suddenly rises  
and your mind is as sharp as a razor  
as fast as a race-car.

Grace fills you with ideas that are  
imaginative, interesting, beautiful  
and that speak exquisitely and simply,  
leaving you just the instrument for their delivery.

Grace gives you the words you need  
and then fills the rest of the space with silence.

A moment of stillness in an afternoon of frenzy.

In the interstices and corners of hard times,  
grace eases the flow of life  
and illuminates the fact of movement  
through the tunnel,  
so you can see that life blossoms everywhere.

October 5, 2008

## SAPTAMI

I have known grace in ways  
that words cannot capture.

In the realm of my dreams,  
grace has been a destination where I have found myself.  
Flowers and fragrances.  
Sun on sea, glinting, shimmering.  
Pastel and silver dawn,  
brilliantly glass mid-day,  
and a breeze that does not end.

Grace is the magical journey  
from mundane to miraculous  
that dreams screen if you are lucky.  
Transformed hands.  
Merging, melding self.  
A presence that straddles  
the waking-sleeping state  
in unimaginable ways,  
experienced as touch, as temperature,  
as love and as grace.

Bliss that stays with you  
on tap for the moments when  
you remain your body  
and your feelings  
and your fears  
and your words.

Grace is remembering that bliss  
so that you can recall it  
and renew yourself.

Grace is breath.  
And grace is definitely  
the breath that takes you  
from where you are to  
where you truly are.  
Grace is being.  
And awareness of being.

In those many, many moments  
when the universe stops to embrace you,  
there is grace.  
I know that grace well,  
I tell you in gratitude.  
Grace is like your mother's lap,  
always a safe place.

Expressed as love,  
inclusion, love,  
belonging, love,  
assistance, love,  
friendship, love,  
compassion, love,  
grace is always unspoken.  
Still, silent grace.

October 6, 2008

## ASHTAMI

Grace is why  
all the horrible things  
that could happen to you  
did not.

In every life,  
there are many.  
Narrow escapes from  
dangers you did not know  
exist.  
Conscious decisions  
that were better than  
you knew.  
Mediocre outcomes  
that would have been a waste.  
Disastrous results that  
would have wasted you.  
The dogged hand of fate  
that moved you away  
from peer pressure  
from family arguments  
from your own weakness  
from the inability to think straight  
in a critical moment.

Grace is the knowledge  
that you must help others  
escape the outcomes

that could have been your life.  
The imperative to help grace along  
is grace.  
And grace is the ability to do that.

Grace is the magic  
that happens when the bad stuff doesn't.  
Even when the road to it  
does not seem magical.

Grace is innocence  
that keeps from you  
what could have been.  
It is your struggling and grudging  
acceptance of what did not happen  
which makes room for the thing  
that is so wonderfully right  
that you did not know it existed  
consider it as a possibility  
admit it in your dream.

Grace is finding a teacher  
in every person you meet  
as you journey away from bad outcomes  
as you struggle with frustration  
as you discover the miracle  
that unfolds in your life.  
And grace is recognizing  
the teaching  
and sometimes, the teacher too.

Grace is the spirit  
that moves the body to do,  
even on days when the body is reluctant.  
And the phenomenally intelligent human body  
is also grace.

Grace lies in the grace of every  
thought, word, action—  
especially positive thought,  
well-chosen word,  
compassionate action.

Grace is the steering wheel  
that guides your body towards  
this domain of the spirit.

Grace is the recognition of grace  
everywhere.

October 7, 2008



## NAVAMI

If you are one of the lucky few  
who do what they love  
with some competence  
and passion  
in a way that is useful to many  
and sustains you,  
you live in grace.

Where there is a joining of  
intellect  
heart  
hands  
spirit,  
that conjunction is grace.

To have  
ideas,  
feelings,  
words,  
skill,  
energy,  
is grace.

If with my hands,  
my heart and my intellect,  
my words and my actions,  
I can be useful,  
creative,

resourceful,  
content,  
it is your grace.

To know the rush of one creative idea after another.  
To know what it is to take dictation when one sits to write.  
To speak verbally and visually,  
and to communicate through silence.  
To mine a bottomless wellspring of commitment,  
fuel it with the energy of passion and ambition,  
temper it with conscience and compassion,  
and work long, hard and happy,  
is to know abundance.  
Abundance of grace.

To be aware that one is not doing  
and to experience the joy of being just an instrument  
but a very keen instrument by virtue of that,  
is grace.

Work.  
Having work.  
Doing useful work.  
Being able to work.  
Working with everything I have.  
Is grace.

And then, compassionate, loving one,  
having filled my life with this grace,  
you give me one day,  
one day off—  
in your honour.

As I wearily shut down for that one holiday,  
and prepare to worship all the things,  
inherent and outward,  
animate and inanimate,  
that enable me to enjoy your grace  
as work, creativity, play, service,  
to worship you,  
I thank you also for this one holiday.  
That too is your grace.

With your leave, and by your grace,  
I will now rest a day  
and return to your labours on the morrow.

October 7, 2008.

## DASHAMI

You make your grace known  
in more ways than we can write about.

In an emerald vision that stays in the heart.  
In the unmistakable touch of a mother  
when her child is sick.  
In a warm glow that suffuses the heart.  
In the walk-in-and-out parts that strangers  
play in a moment of crisis.

In the generosity of others.  
In my own impulse to generosity.  
In kindness and consideration.  
In nurture and bonding.

You make your grace known  
in unexpected ways.

In the isolation of alienation  
that spurs inner growth.  
In anger over injustice  
that moves one to action.  
In moving beyond negativity  
of any sort,  
towards good thought, word, deed.  
In the people and events that catalyse  
such movement.

I feel your grace a million times a minute.  
Sometimes mindfully, too rarely, I suspect.  
Most of the time with relief  
barely registering my good fortune.

The moments that I know  
are the magical moments of my life.  
But my life is a composite  
of all the moments of your grace  
which never wavers or diminishes.

October 9, 2008

## SAMAPTI

This year, I have written about your grace  
mostly writing about myself.

From a certain point of view, this is  
wrong.  
Self-centred.  
Weird.  
Unacceptable.  
But if you remember, this is where  
we finish every year.

There is neither separation nor separateness  
between you and me.  
The most important sign of your grace  
is that knowledge.  
The most important confirmation of your grace  
lies in my growing internalization of it.

This year, since you already know what I am thinking,  
I decided to point out some areas in which your grace  
might be even more abundant,  
or explicit, if you prefer.

We could have world peace, for starters.  
We could have a climate of reconciliation  
and mutual acceptance.  
A deep-seated realization that we sink or swim together  
and must work together on our shared problems.

We could have less talk and more action  
by everybody.

We could have more cleanliness and order.  
A reversal of global warming.  
Conservation without conservatism.  
Better weather might cool our tempers too!

And while you are working on all that,  
I will put in a word for the many who are suffering at this moment.  
From illness and from its aftermath.  
From violence. By family, friends, strangers or states.  
From the impact of crises, whether  
they created them or not.  
From bereavement and loss.  
From the negativity of their own hearts  
and the limits of their own mind.

Make the bad stuff go away  
and make the good stuff obvious  
even to those who do not seek.

In my outer life, too, I have a list.  
Give me the means to do the work  
you and I both want me to do.  
Give me the physical strength  
and well-being to do it  
and enable me to help you with that.  
Give me the people I need.  
Open doors. Make the waves part.

Give me the words I need to speak my piece.  
Open their hearts and minds to my words.

Give the people around me  
good health, prosperity and peace of mind.  
Give them good days, good ways  
and good internet connections.  
Give them the will and the means to communicate.  
Touch their lives as you touch mine.  
And touch the lives of those around them.  
Radiating circle after circle of grace.

Let love truly become the default emotion.  
Let compassion become a lingua franca.

And a special request or two  
from my inner life.  
Give me patience.  
Give me acceptance and  
teach me to surrender.  
Give me the ability to be attentive  
and to be calm  
so I can finish what you assign to me.  
Give me a lot of calm.

Let me remember to accept and allow  
the flow of your grace through  
my self, life and days  
without doubt,  
without interruption,

without foolish intervention  
or pig-headed pursuit of lesser goals.

And in my turn,  
I give some things too.

First, I have a load of crap to dump in your garden.  
Anger.  
Doubt.  
Impatience.  
Intolerance.  
The urge to criticise and mock others.  
But remember, don't take it all.  
All these things are good up to a point,  
and I am only giving you the excess.

I am also giving you self-doubt.  
You can have all of my self-loathing moments.  
You can take all my aches and pains  
maybe just leaving me enough  
for me to value my body.  
You can take away awkwardness  
and anxiety and shyness.  
You can have avarice (not ambition).  
You can take away fear, almost altogether —  
just leave enough for me to be careful.

Is your backyard full  
or have all these things turned to  
light, fragrant rose-petals and  
barely filled it?

In that case, you can just leave the truck  
parked at the edge of my life  
so I can dump the things that  
I cannot remember right now.

In my life, is your grace.

In your heart, is my life.

This giving and this taking  
are notional.

The easy way to explain  
the transformation that we wreak together.  
So that the difference and distance  
that appears between us  
vanishes.

That is the victory  
we anticipate  
and celebrate  
today.

October 9, 2008



