

## Preparation for G107 – Chance, Karma, Destiny, and Grace

Chance and luck. Fate and karma. Destiny and free will. Grace and God's will. Throughout time, humans have continually asked the questions, "Why do things happen?" and "Am I in control of my destiny? If not, who or what is?" These questions and their answers are fundamental to all world religions and belief systems. They also touch on whether we feel that our actions—indeed our very lives—make a real difference in the world.

Some of us may believe that the universe is essentially random and that there is no special significance or no single explanation for events. Some of us may believe that everything that happens to us is the result of our past actions in this or a past life; in other words, it's karma. Some may not believe in karma and past lives but believe that we control our own destinies or make our own luck. Some of us may attribute all outcomes to "grace," God's will, or the action of some other higher power.

So, what do you think about the forces that have shaped the course of your life? What has influenced your belief (people, events, experiences, philosophies, religions, etc.)? Has your belief changed over your lifetime?

This is a very broad, open-ended topic and we hope it provokes some interesting reflection and discussion in your group. The following story might also provide food for thought.

### **"It Matters"**

-- taken from text by Robert R. Walsh, *Noisy Stones*, 1992, reprinted in *Day of Promise, Collected Meditations Volume One*, edited by Kathleen Montgomery, Skinner House Books (UUA), 2001.

I knew a man who had printed on his stationery this proverb: "Nothing is settled. Everything matters." I remember him and his proverb sometimes, especially when it seems impossible to change the world or myself in any significant way.

"Sorry, Jim," I say. "It's not true that nothing is settled. In the past year, choices have been made, losses have been suffered, there have been growth and decay, there have been commitments and betrayals. None of that can be undone. One day this year, I was present just when someone needed me; another day I was busy doing something else when I was needed. One day I said something to a friend that injured our relationship; another day I said something that enabled a person to see life in a new way. The best and the worst of those days is now written. All my tears, of joy or sorrow, cannot erase it."

"Robbie," says Jim, "You have misunderstood the proverb. It is true that you cannot escape the consequences of your actions or the chances of the world. But what is not settled is how the story turns out. What is not settled is what the meaning of your life will be.

"The meaning of a life is not contained within one act, or one day, or one year. As long as you are alive the story of your life is still being told, and the meaning is still open. As long as there is life in the world, the story of the world is still being told. What is done is done, but *nothing is settled*.

"And if nothing is settled, then *everything matters*. Every choice, every act in the new year matters. Every word, every deed is making the meaning of your life and telling the story of the world. Everything matters in the year coming, and, more important, everything matters today."