

# Commentary on *What is a Miracle?*

By Allen Watson

## Paragraph 1

A miracle is a correction. It does not create, nor really change at all. It merely looks on devastation, and reminds the mind that what it sees is false. It undoes error, but does not attempt to go beyond perception, nor exceed the function of forgiveness. Thus it stays within time's limits. Yet it paves the way for the return of timelessness and love's awakening, for fear must slip away under the gentle remedy it brings. W-pII.13.1:1-6

The miracle *corrects*; it does not *create*. It does not make anything new; it merely adjusts a mistaken assessment of what already is. As Lesson 341 says, we already are sinless. We do not need to become sinless. All that we need to do is to end our attack on our own sinlessness.

We think of a miracle as some amazing change in the way things are. But a miracle, as the Course sees it, changes nothing. It simply takes away a false perception. It removes the veneer of sin and guilt we have laid over our innocence, and reveals the unchanging innocence we have attempted to hide.

A miracle often has external effects, although not always:

Miracles are expressions of love, but they may not always have observable effects. (T-1.I.35:1)

When there are such effects, something in the illusion seems to change, often drastically. Someone who was sick gets well. Two people who were at war suddenly make peace. Yet that is the *effect* of the miracle, not the miracle itself. The effect simply reveals in form what has always been true in reality—the “sick” person was always whole, the “warring” friends were always joined as one mind. The observable effect shows us that the form was never real in the first place; but the miracle is the perception that *saw* that before it was an observable effect, and by realizing the falsity of the illusion, changed the illusion.

It [a miracle] merely looks on devastation, and reminds the mind that what it sees is false. (1:3)

The miracle looks on the illusion, and reminds the mind that it *is* illusion. We do see “devastation” in this world, but the miracle reminds us that what we see is false. We see a person's mind twisted with guilt; the miracle reminds us that the guilt is as unreal as its apparent effects, and enables us to see the person's wholeness and innocence behind the illusion they present to the world.

It [a miracle] undoes error, but does not attempt to go beyond perception, nor exceed the function of forgiveness. (1:4)

A miracle relates to perception, and not to direct revelation. It causes a change in my perception, undoing my perceptual errors.

Wholeness is the perceptual content of miracles. They thus correct, or atone for, the faulty perception of lack. (T-1.I.41:1-2)

When my mind experiences a miracle, I see wholeness instead of lack. In regard to “sin,” which is a perception of lack of love in someone, the miracle causes me to see their love instead of their “sin.” I see them as whole, rather than as lacking. The miracle undoes my error, but it does not attempt to go beyond that. Miracles occur within the context of perception and of time; they do not try to carry me to the realm of knowledge and of eternity. They correct my perception but they do not give knowledge. “Thus it stays within time’s limits” (1:5).

The Course makes this point repeatedly; it must be important. What makes it so important to us? This: When we turn to a spiritual path, we can become overanxious. We want a miracle to translate us immediately into the realm of pure spirit. We want a quick fix. But we cannot make a transition directly from false perception to pure knowledge. We have to go through the stage of corrected perception. We can’t skip steps. The Text says it clearly: “Perception must be straightened out before you can know anything” (T-3.III.1:2). That is what miracles are for: correcting our perception. Once our perception is corrected, God can take us the rest of the way, from perception to knowledge.

Redeemed perception is easily translated into knowledge, for only perception is capable of error and perception has never been. Being corrected it gives place to knowledge, which is forever the only reality. (T-12.VIII.8:6–7)

Yet it [the miracle] paves the way for the return of timelessness and love’s awakening, for fear must slip away under the gentle remedy it brings. (1:6)

The “gentle remedy” of the miracle, in correcting our perception, “paves the way” for a return to full knowledge. Without the undoing of our false perception, we will resist knowledge and reject love; we will be afraid of it. Our twisted perception of love, for instance, believes that love means sacrifice, and that total love would mean total sacrifice. We therefore run away from it; we fear it. Such perceptions need to be changed before we would even be willing to let real love awaken within us. Because the miracle removes our fear, it opens the way for love. It ends our resistance; it removes the interference.

## Paragraph 2

A miracle contains the gift of grace, for it is given and received as one. And thus it illustrates the law of truth the world does not obey, because it fails entirely to understand its ways. A miracle inverts perception which was upside down before, and thus it ends the strange distortions that were manifest. Now is perception open to the truth. Now is forgiveness seen as justified. W-pII.13.2:1-5

One of the most frequently repeated lessons of the entire Course is that giving and receiving are the same: “To give and to receive are one in truth” (W-pII.108.Heading). This lesson, one of the most basic the Holy Spirit wants to teach us (it is the first lesson of the Holy Spirit in Chapter 6: “To have, give all to all”—T-6.V(A).5:13), is also one of the hardest for us to learn because it is the antithesis of our normal way of thinking.

A miracle contains the gift of grace, for it is given and received as one. (2:1)

To receive a miracle, we must give it; to give it, we must receive it. Receiving a miracle and giving a miracle are one thing, not two. Many of us get wrapped up in trying to figure out whether I must forgive myself first to forgive someone else, or whether I have to forgive the other person before I can forgive myself. The answer is, neither and both. To forgive yourself you must forgive the other person, but to forgive the other person, you must forgive yourself. They are one. They seem to be two distinct actions but they are not; they are one action because my brother and

I are one Self. It may often seem, within time, that one precedes the other, but in reality, both happen simultaneously.

“And thus it illustrates the law of truth the world does not obey, because it fails entirely to understand its ways” (2:2). The “law of truth” is, I think, the same as the “law of love” mentioned in the title of Lesson 344: “What I give my brother is my gift to me.” Were we to completely appropriate this one thought, we would be out of here, done with the curriculum. A miracle illustrates this law; it gives a pictorial representation of it, a demonstration of it. When I give a miracle to a brother, I am looking on his devastation and realizing that what I see is false (1:3). I am seeing his wholeness rather than the illusion of his lack. My seeing that for someone else reminds them to see it for themselves, if they wish to. And when they receive the miracle, I am blessed. I am reminded of who I am.

The world does not obey this law, nor understand it. Unlearning the world’s way of thinking about this is what the Course calls “undoing the getting concept” (T-6.V(B).3:1). It calls this the first step in the reversal of our ego’s thinking. Miracles are important to us because they illustrate this law; they help us know, by experience, that giving is receiving; that I keep what I want by giving it away.

So the perceptions we have learned from the ego are upside down; a miracle inverts those perceptions and makes them right-side up again. Perhaps this is a reference to the way that physical sight works. In physical sight, the image projected by the lens of our eyes upon the retina is actually upside down. The mind literally learns to see the upside down image as right-side up. In an experiment in which people were given glasses to wear that inverted the image, so that it was right-side up on the retina, the mind saw everything as upside down. After a number of days, however, the mind adjusted and saw everything again as the right way. When the glasses were removed, people now saw things as being upside down!

The perception that what I give, I lose, for instance, is entirely upside down; true perception shows me that what I give I keep. We perceive what is false, but our minds have learned to interpret it as truth. We see illusions and think them real; we believe that reality is the illusion. We fear love, and love fear. We think guilt is good, and innocence is guilty. A miracle inverts all this; it corrects our perception, inverting our understanding. The change in perception is what ends the distortion in what is being manifested (that is, showing up in form).

“Now is perception open to the truth” (2:4). When the miracle inverts my perception, and ends the distortion, I am again capable of perceiving the truth (or its accurate reflection). Until perception is corrected, truth cannot enter.

“Now is forgiveness seen as justified” (2:5). This is perhaps the most dramatic reversal of all. One of the most radical ideas in the Course is that forgiveness is *justified*. If we think of forgiveness at all from the ego perspective, we think of it as someone’s being let off the hook for no reason, “out of the goodness of our hearts.” The Course says that there is every reason to forgive. It is fully justified (see T-30.VI.2:1). What is unjustifiable is judgment, condemnation, and anger (see T-30.VI.1:1). This is simply not something that can be learned or arrived at through logic (although it is entirely logical). When we see our condemnation of someone as just, that is just how we see it. Trying to reason ourselves into seeing it differently doesn’t work. Nor can we “should” ourselves into it. If we try to force ourselves to “forgive” while still seeing guilt, we feel as though we are being untrue to ourselves.

When you give your perception to the Holy Spirit and ask to see as He sees, He gives you His perception. It simply springs into the mind. Suddenly you literally no longer see any reason to condemn, and every reason to give love. Your anger, perfectly justified a moment ago, now seems unthinkable. It is like the shift that occurs in looking at a Magic Eye illustration (where a 3-D picture is hidden in a two-dimensional one) or a figure-ground optical illusion (such as the one that can be seen either as a wine goblet or as two faces looking at one another). You are seeing it one way; suddenly you are seeing it another way. And when you see it one way you

cannot see the other way. Just so is the miracle. It inverts your perception. You were seeing one way; now you see the other. You can't "make" it happen, but when it happens, you know it.

### Paragraph 3

Forgiveness is the home of miracles. The eyes of Christ deliver them to all they look upon in mercy and in love. Perception stands corrected in His sight, and what was meant to curse has come to bless. Each lily of forgiveness offers all the world the silent miracle of love. And each is laid before the Word of God, upon the universal altar to Creator and creation in the light of perfect purity and endless joy. W-pII.13.3:1-5

A miracle corrects perception, and miracles live in forgiveness. When we look with the eyes of Christ, we see with mercy and in love; we see with forgiveness. And we then "deliver" miracles to everyone we see with that corrected perception. It is not just that something changes within our minds, not just that our perception is altered; something gets communicated or "delivered" from us to those we look upon. A miracle here, and in many places in the Course, seems to include an aspect in which something passes from my forgiving mind to the minds of others. Miracles are said to be "interpersonal" (T-1.II.1:4). When I accept forgiveness within my mind, for myself or another, it extends to others. Indeed it is by extending it that I accept it:

Miracles are natural signs of forgiveness. Through miracles you accept God's forgiveness by extending it to others. (T-1.I.21:1-2)

The phrase "and what was meant to curse has come to bless" reminds me of the Bible story of Joseph and his brothers. Because Joseph was the favorite of his father, his brothers, jealous of him, sold him into slavery in Egypt. But Joseph, because of his ability to interpret the Pharaoh's dreams, rose to great power in Egypt. Years later, in a famine, his family came to Egypt seeking food, and Joseph was the man in control of the food supply. Instead of taking vengeance on them, Joseph told them:

God sent me before you to preserve life...it was not you who sent me here, but God...You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. (Gn 45:5, 8; 50:20)

When we have truly received forgiveness into our hearts, we will be able to see the blessing even in actions that others intend for our harm. "What was meant to curse has come to bless." We find that, as the Text says:

Gratitude is due him for both his loving thoughts and his appeals for help [that is, what we normally see as his attacks], for both are capable of bringing love into your awareness if you perceive them truly. (T-12.I.6:2)

And *that* kind of perception is, indeed, a miracle.

Each lily of forgiveness offers all the world the silent miracle of love. (3:4)

Love is the real miracle.

Miracles occur naturally as expressions of love. The real miracle is the love that inspires them. In this sense everything that comes from love is a miracle. (T-1.I.3:1-3)

The symbol of the lily represents a gift of forgiveness I give to a brother or sister. Each time I offer this gift, I am offering God's Love to the entire world. I am opening a floodgate and allowing that Love to flow into the world through me. Wherever that river of Love comes, life springs up; and that is the miracle.

And each [lily] is laid before the Word of God, upon the universal altar to Creator and creation in the light of perfect purity and endless joy. (3:5)

My gift of forgiveness given to my brother is also a gift to God. My gratitude to my brothers is my gift to God. In acknowledging His creation, I acknowledge Him. Opening to this current of Love is the source of perfect purity and endless joy. There is nothing so joyful as a loving heart.

#### Paragraph 4

The miracle is taken first on faith, because to ask for it implies the mind has been made ready to conceive of what it cannot see and does not understand. Yet faith will bring its witnesses to show that what it rested on is really there. And thus the miracle will justify your faith in it, and show it rested on a world more real than what you saw before; a world redeemed from what you thought was there. **W-pII.13.4:1-3**

Faith. Yes, *A Course in Miracles* asks for faith, at least at the beginning. "The miracle is taken *first* on faith." This is a fairly traditional meaning for the word "faith." The American Heritage Dictionary defines faith as "Belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence." And that is what is being asked of us. We are being asked to receive the miracle (the change of perception, the vision of our brother's innocence) without any "proof or material evidence." We are being asked to look on devastation (such as sickness, or the harm done by someone's unloving actions) and to believe that what we see is false—without "material evidence."

This is not an easy thing to do, to believe in something we cannot see. And yet, if our false perception has blinded us to reality, and we are now perceiving the projections of our own minds in place of truth, then obviously the truth is now something we do not see. And since what our mind chooses to see is what we see, the mind *must* change before we can perceive truly. We have to choose to change our mind *before we see the evidence*, because, in order for the miracle to manifest, our minds must first be "made ready to conceive of what [they] cannot see and [do] not understand." In other words, we must make a choice on faith; we must decide that we desire to see something we cannot now see and something we do not understand.

This reminds me very much of those very early lessons in the Workbook, Lessons 27 and 28: "Above all else I want to see" and "Above all else I want to see things differently." That choice has to be made before we can see anything. We must *want* to see in order to see. That is the faith being talked about here. It is a choice, a decision we must make. We must *want* to see our brother innocent. We must *want* only love. We must be willing to see things differently. Only then will we see miracles.

There must be faith before a miracle: the desire to see it, the choice to ask for what we cannot now see, and to believe that what our ego-generated perception shows us is false. But when that faith arises, when we become miracle-minded, that faith will produce its own vindication:

Yet faith will bring its witnesses to show that what it rested on is really there.  
(4:2)

When I place my faith in a miracle, there will be evidence—witnesses—to prove that what I put my faith in truly exists. When, for instance, I am willing to look past my brother's ego and to see the call for God in him, something will happen that will witness to me that the call for God in him is really there. Perhaps my forgiveness will be met with gratitude. Perhaps my response of

love will be met with love returning. Perhaps, in someone of whom I never believed it possible, I will see a spark of light. Faith *will* bring its witnesses.

And thus the miracle will justify your faith in it, and show it rested on a world more real than what you saw before; a world redeemed from what you thought was there.  
(4:3)

My willingness to believe in love's presence will show me love's presence. I will see what I choose to see. I will see that the world of spirit is more real than the world of mere matter. Sickness will give way to health. Sadness will be replaced with joy. Fear will be transformed to love. And where I thought I saw sin and evil, I will see holiness and good.

It is the transformation of my mind that brings about a different world. It is my readiness to invite the miracle that opens the way for it. The changes in the world I see are not the miracle; they are its results. The miracle *brings* witnesses; it reveals a world different from what I thought it was. First, though, the change of mind, the faith. Then the witness to faith, justifying it, validating it.

## Paragraph 5

Miracles fall like drops of healing rain from Heaven on a dry and dusty world, where starved and thirsty creatures come to die. Now they have water. Now the world is green. And everywhere the signs of life spring up, to show that what is born can never die, for what has life has immortality. W-pII.13.5:1-4

In stark imagery, this section refers to our world as “a dry and dusty world, where starved and thirsty creatures come to die” (5:1). The Course says, more than once, that we came to this world in order to die; we sought death by coming to a place where everything dies. For instance, “You came to die, and what would you expect but to perceive the signs of death you seek?” (T-29.VII.5:2). “It is not will for life but wish for death that is the motivation for this world” (T-27.I.6:3). We came out of guilt, believing in our own sin and seeking our own punishment. We came because somehow, in the twisted logic of the ego, death is the ultimate proof of our success at separating from God. We made this world as a place to die in, and then we came to die in it.

But “miracles fall like drops of healing rain from Heaven” on this parched land we have made, and the miracles turn it into a paradise.

Now they [the starved and thirsty creatures, which are ourselves] have water. Now the world is green. (5:2–3)

Miracles, then, transform the world of death we made into a place of life. Chapter 26 of the Text, in Section IX (“For They Have Come”) extends the same images:

The blood of hatred fades to let the grass grow green again, and let the flowers be all white and sparkling in the summer sun. What was a place of death has now become a living temple in a world of light. Because of Them. It is Their Presence which has lifted holiness again to take its ancient place upon an ancient throne. Because of Them have miracles sprung up as grass and flowers on the barren ground that hate had scorched and rendered desolate. What hate has wrought have They undone. And now you stand on ground so holy Heaven leans to join with it, and make it like itself. The shadow of an ancient hate has gone, and all the blight and withering have passed forever from the land where They have come. (T-26.IX.3:1–8)

We open to miracles when we open to forgiveness and love, when we open to God. “They” and “Them” in this Text section refer to the face of Christ (the sight of our brothers’ innocence) and the memory of God. When we allow ourselves to see the face of Christ in our brothers, the memory of God returns to us. When that happens, the “scorched and...desolate” ground of this world becomes a garden, a reflection of Heaven.

As we open our lives to miracles, the world is transformed.

And everywhere the signs of life spring up, to show that what is born can never die, for what has life has immortality. (5:4)

Miracles demonstrate immortality. Not immortality of the body, but immortality of love, which is what we are (“Teach only love, for that is what you are” [T-6.I.13:2]; “Only the eternal can be loved, for love does not die” [T-10.V.9:1]). It is the immortality of thought, and the Course also teaches that we are the eternal Thought of God, unchangeable. The Course asserts boldly that there is no death, that life and immortality are synonymous (“what has life has immortality”). By that logic, then, the body must not have life, because it is not immortal, and so the Course

teaches: “It [the body] is not born and does not die” (T-28.VI.2:4). “The body neither lives nor dies, because it cannot contain you who are life” (T-6.V(A)1:4).

Miracles show us that we are not bodies, that mind is stronger than or primary to the body:

If the mind can heal the body, but the body cannot heal the mind, then the mind must be stronger than the body. Every miracle demonstrates this. (T-6.V(A).2:6–7)

It shows us that what we are—mind, thought, idea, love—has life and is immortal.