



# A Better Way

A Newsletter for Students of **A Course in Miracles**

*"I come to you from our Father to offer you everything again."*

Fall 2002

The Circle of Atonement

Issue #39

## DOES GOD HAVE A PLAN?

by Robert Perry

**D**oes God have a specific plan for us, something in particular He wants us to do with our lives? Normally, I would address this question by discussing passages from *A Course in Miracles* (there are many that answer this question quite explicitly; see, for instance, W-pI.135.18). In this article, however, I want to address it from the standpoint of my own life experience. I have had many experiences that seem to me to reveal the workings of a higher plan, and these experiences, I believe, have taught me a great deal about how the plan actually works. I would like to share one of these experiences, a particularly pivotal one, and then attempt to draw out what this episode says about the plan itself.

### An example from my life

In my teens and early twenties I knew where my life was going. I was heading for a career in philosophy. In my mid-teens I had begun asking questions about life and trying to figure out the answers. I wrote my insights down and, after a few years, the beginnings of a philosophical system began to emerge. It addressed traditional philosophical questions and many psychological questions. I loved this sort of thing. I had a passion for truth and felt completely at home creating a system of ideas aimed at finding it. My system attempted to explain the nature of consciousness, including the workings of thought, will, emotion, and memory, from a novel vantage point (one that I still think has great promise). It contained a proof for God's existence which was not a variation on the traditional proofs. I was pleased when Huston Smith,

the great scholar of world religions, said he thought the proof worked and recommended a journal that might publish it (though he admitted to not being excited about such proofs).

On my twenty-first birthday something pivotal occurred. I had gone to a local park to think. There, my thoughts turned to my *magnum opus*, which I planned to write in about ten years, when my system was more developed. This would be a huge book—at least 1,000 pages—in which I would present my system to the world. While at the park an unusual and significant thing happened: it felt as if a title for my magnum opus was just dropped into my mind. You may have experienced something similar, where an idea pops into your head fully formed, feeling as if

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it has just been downloaded from somewhere else, rather than conceived by you. The title was *Behold the Man*. This comes from the scene in the Gospel of John where Pilate is presenting Jesus to the crowd. He brings out Jesus, who has just been beaten and scourged and crowned with thorns, and says to the mob, "Behold the man."

I couldn't believe how perfect this title was for my book, for at least two reasons. First, my system was claiming to reveal what human nature is, how it works on the surface and what it is at its depths. *Behold the Man* seemed to capture this perfectly. It seemed to say "Behold the *Nature* of Man." Second, my system claimed that, despite our frail, mortal appearance, our fundamental nature is spiritual or divine. This seemed to be perfectly

*(continued on page 3)*

## A Better Way

is published by **The Circle of Atonement: Teaching and Healing Center**, a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation founded in 1993, and located in Sedona, Arizona. It is based on *A Course in Miracles*, the three-volume modern spiritual classic, which we believe was authored by Jesus through a human scribe.

### Mission Statement

To discern the author's vision of *A Course in Miracles* and manifest that in our lives, in the lives of students, and in the world.

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Our financial policy is based on a line in *Psychotherapy*, a supplement to *A Course in Miracles*: "One rule should always be observed: No one should be turned away because he cannot pay." Therefore, if you would like any of our materials or services and cannot afford them, simply let us know, and give what you are able.

The Circle is supported entirely by your purchases and gifts. Therefore, we ask you to look within to see if you might be led to support the Circle's vision financially with a donation above the list price of materials. We encourage you to give, not in payment for goods received, but in support of our present and future outreach. Please note that only amounts given over the list price are considered tax-deductible.

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The title of our newsletter comes from Bill Thetford's comment to Helen Schucman that "There must be another way" (quoted in *Absence from Felicity*, p.93), and from Jesus' comment in the Course (T-2.111.3:6) that, "Everyone eventually begins to recognize, however dimly, that there *must* be a better way." We hope that this newsletter will be helpful to you on your journey to this "better way."

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## Circle Events

### Regular Classes in Sedona, Arizona

#### Daily Workbook Class

With Mary Anne Buchowski or Robert Perry  
Weekday mornings, 8:30 - 9:30 am

#### Weekly Class

With Robert Perry  
Tuesday evenings, 7:00 - 8:30 pm, starting Sept. 3  
*Call our office for details*

### Regular Classes in Portland, Oregon

#### Topical and Text Classes

With Allen Watson or Greg Mackie  
Tuesday evenings, 7:00 - 9:00 pm, starting Sept. 10  
*Contact Allen Watson*  
([allen@circleofacom.com](mailto:allen@circleofacom.com); (503) 284-3619)

### Workshops

#### Seeing Conflict Differently

With Robert Perry  
October 19 - 20, 2002: Sedona, Arizona  
*See enclosed flyer for full details*

#### FOR YOUR CALENDAR

**The Course's approach to goal-setting, meditation and spiritual practice**  
With Robert Perry  
January 25 - 26, 2003: Charlottesville, Virginia  
*Contact Foundation for the study of A Course in Miracles*  
([ger@gemlink.com](mailto:ger@gemlink.com); (434) 924-3296)

#### Workshop on self-esteem

With Robert Perry  
February 1 - 2, 2003: Sedona, Arizona

### England

#### Course-Based Healing Sessions

*Contact Nicola Harvey*  
([nicola@circleofa.com](mailto:nicola@circleofa.com); (01425) 656441)

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captured by that scene from the life of Jesus. Here he was a divine being, yet in that moment he looked all too human—broken, bloody, on the verge of death. In my eyes, the title seemed to almost gesture over to Jesus as he stood in front of the crowd and say, “Behold the nature of man; though he looks all too human, he is really divine.” This title was so sacred to me that for the next several years I refused to tell it to more than one other person.

I got back from the park and met a collection of friends who were taking me out to dinner. I still have a picture of me at the Mexican restaurant that night, looking like an idiot under one of those huge sombreros. When we got back home I received my birthday present. At the instigation of Susan (my then-fiancée), my friends had chipped in to buy me a book I had read about months before but was too lazy or too cheap to buy: *A Course in Miracles*. As we sat there with me holding the blue books (they were three separate volumes back then), it felt like an important moment, and as it turned out, it was. That moment changed my whole life.

Not long after (perhaps even that night), I realized that something very strange had happened that day. On the same day that I had received that perfect title for my book I had also been given *A Course in Miracles*. I had been given someone *else's* 1000-page magnum opus, which

presented an intellectual system that, like mine, was philosophical, psychological, and ultimately, spiritual. This system claimed, like mine, to reveal how our minds and emotions work and to reveal what we fundamentally are. Like mine, it presented Jesus as a symbol for the rest of us, human in appearance but divine in truth, whose brutal end was a poignant symbol of the human condition. Finally, its title, just like my title, subtly likened us to Jesus. The title of *A Course in Miracles* claims that it will teach us to do what Jesus did; that is, work miracles.

I was amazed by the parallels with my book. This could not be chance, I thought. It was almost as if someone had given me the book that I planned to write. I intuitively felt that this simply had to mean *something*. But what? Without giving it much thought, I concluded it meant that there must be something important about the Course for me and something important about that title of mine—with my emphasis on the second, of course. As it turned out, I had no idea of the real implications of that day.

If I had thought more about it, there was a fairly obvious message there. As I said, it was almost as if someone had given me the book that I planned to write. That potentially carried a disturbing implication: my book was already written, and by someone else. Moreover, this was not just anyone else. This book claimed to be written by Jesus. My book merely held Jesus up as the symbol for our true nature; this book was supposedly written by him.

## From the Editor

Our lead article is a personal story of mine that is both about the issue of God having a plan for our lives, as well as the story of how I realized that my special function is to teach the Course. We also have a wonderful story from Nicola Harvey about one of her healings. This will give you a sense of what can happen in a Course-based healing session. We also have a Q&A from Greg Mackie. It deals with how we can deny the world, as the Course asks us to, without turning a blind eye to the suffering in the world. Can we see the illusory nature of the world without merely becoming callous? This is a question that seems to confront all Course students. We also have an article of mine that attempts to sketch the basic outline of what a Course-based psychotherapist would do.

It is based on a study I did of the Course supplement, *Psychotherapy: Purpose, Process and*

*Practice*, in which I summarized each paragraph and then reordered everything, grouping all the similar themes together, and then trying to articulate the whole picture that emerged. The result was immensely clarifying for me. For the first time I felt I had a whole picture of how Jesus sees Course-based psychotherapy.

Our last issue of *A Better Way*, which was on the relationship between our teaching on the Course and that of Ken Wapnick, elicited an unusual amount of mail, and we have included some of that in this issue and will include more in the next issue, as most of it seemed to come in after this issue was already typeset.



If this was true (and I eventually came to believe it was) it changed everything. Why would the student think of writing the book which the master had already written? At that point what could the student do but devote himself to the master's book?

With a little reflection, I would have seen that the seemingly exciting, enigmatic events of that day carried a hard message: rather than devoting my career to my book, I would devote it to someone else's. This was such a deeply unwelcome message that it did not even occur to me. At that point, in fact, there was no power on earth that could have caused me to seriously consider that possibility.

That message, however, kept knocking at my door. After a few years, I received what I felt was genuine guidance that I would teach the Course. I took this in stride, assuming this must mean that I would teach the Course on the side, while my day job would of course be my philosophical system. In the meantime, my best friend had started working for a local Course center; then my wife started working there. Next I was asked to teach there, and then write. After a few years, I began receiving invitations to travel and do workshops elsewhere. I turned around and found I had a career in teaching *A Course in Miracles*.

Yet throughout this time I still held onto the idea (though my grip was weakening) that my real career was going to be devoted to my own system. To think that I had an original contribution to make to humanity's quest for truth, but that I would forever keep silent about it while I promoted someone else's contribution, was a bitter pill to swallow.

Then, on my thirty-first birthday, ten full years after I received the Course, I did a Course workshop in Oklahoma City. On the plane trip home I thought the whole thing through. In that time I had come to believe that the Course had importance not just for a few New Agers, but for the entire world. I had also come to realize that, as an intellectual system, it towered above anything I could ever have produced. I also was aware that it would require a great deal of intellectual work to draw out that system and make its wisdom clear to others, which meant that there was a need for someone like me. In sum, I saw

with perfect clarity that all those years ago on my twenty-first birthday, *this* is what I had been hired to do. It had all been set from the moment I got the Course (and who knows how long before). I was to take the same passion for truth and the same intellectual abilities that I planned to devote to my system and devote them to his. On that day I finally got the message and I finally said "yes," and I have never looked back.

## 10 observations about the plan

In hindsight, I felt I could see a genuine plan of the Holy Spirit at work in this situation, a plan that from the start had its own idea of where I should be heading, and that managed to gently nudge my life in its direction. The way the plan seemed to work in this situation is exactly like what I have seen in many other situations. Therefore, I would like to use this story as a window onto the workings of the Holy Spirit's plan. What can it tell us about the plan? I have drawn from it the following ten observations.

### 1. God's plan may trash our plans, but always for something far better.

True, my plans for my life got trashed, but I have grown to realize that His plan is far better. The Course has led me in directions I would never have gone on my

own. Not only is the Course vastly superior to my system as an intellectual system, but it is also a path of transformation. My system aimed purely at explanation, not transformation, and frankly a good portion of its value for me was that *I* was the explainer. Thus, my system had the inherent danger of exalting my ego, whereas the Course is aimed at erasing my ego. It is always more edifying for the student to represent the master than to represent himself.

### 2. When the plan comes knocking at our door we may not hear it. Even if we do hear it to some degree, we will probably try to minimize the changes it spells for our lives.

As you saw in my story, I had no clue what plan was actually knocking at my door on that fateful day. And even when, years later, I started to faintly hear the knocking, I didn't consider that it might mean a whole different life than the one I had planned. It was like an alarm whose sound I automatically tried to incorporate into my dreams, rather than hearing it as the wake-up call it was.

### 3. The plan has a mind of its own, a mind over which we have no power. It comes up with novel, creative

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**ideas for our lives that are completely independent of our ideas (though there may at times be some similarity).**

This characteristic of the plan is probably the most threatening, yet it can also be deeply consoling. While I was making plans for my life, there was Someone else out there making different plans, plans I never would have made myself. Devote my intellectual career to a channeled book? What kind of crazy idea is that? Yet no matter how crazy it would have seemed to me, there was absolutely nothing I could have done to change this Mind. That can feel very threatening, as if there is some general up in the sky sending us into battle without regard for our personal welfare. Yet we can also experience it as comforting, for it means that there is Someone watching over us in a very specific way, Someone Who is not just a figment of our imagination, but Who has a Mind all His Own, and Who knows what is in our best interests.

**4. The plan will give us a role to play in the world's salvation. This gives us the opportunity to live for a meaningful purpose.**

In my experience the plan is particularly focused on giving us a role to play in the larger purpose of saving the world. This may sound trite, yet it seems to be exactly what happened in my story. It looks as if I was hired to fill a need. One could reasonably infer that in some way, to some degree, the Course needed me, just as the world apparently needed the Course. To feel that our lives are filling a meaningful purpose in a larger plan is something we all crave. Who wants to feel that his life is serving no purpose? Who wants to feel totally useless? The belief that I am being used for a larger purpose has been an incalculable gift. It fills my life with meaning and keeps me going in the face of all the obstacles.

**5. The role the plan gives us is perfectly tailored to our talents, abilities, and interests. It wouldn't fit anyone else like it fits us.**

I already pointed out that the plan clearly drew upon the exact same things in me that had given rise to my system: my passion for truth and my skills in assembling a system of ideas. I have been struck for years at just how tailor-made for me this function is. It is as if Someone knew me inside and out, better than I knew myself, and designed a role that fits me like a glove.

**6. The plan will use our talents and abilities, but in a way that is different than the way our ego would use them.**

This, of course, was a major theme of my story. Not only would it have never occurred to me that I would devote my career to another philosopher's system, it was even further from my mind that this master philosopher would be Jesus, and that he had expressed his system in the form of a channeled book. The whole situation was just a little weird.

**7. For this reason the plan may well frustrate our ego's desires. Given this, we may resist it for a long time.**

This was almost the central theme of my story. This plan was Someone else's idea and I liked mine better. Thus, even while His played out, I stubbornly clung to mine.

**8. The plan will frustrate our ego because its purpose is to lead us beyond our ego, towards the transcendence of our ego.**

The plan is almost sneaky. It will not only give us a role to play in the world's salvation, it will design that role in such a way that fulfilling it naturally wears away our ego until it is gone. In my plan for my life, my ego stood at the top of a

system of explanation that it had designed. It was king. In the Holy Spirit's plan for my life, my ego stands at the bottom of a system of transformation, one that is totally intent on erasing it. Further, the fact that I teach this system has pushed me into giving myself to its goal of erasing my ego. I am ten times the student I would be if I had never become a teacher. Somehow I suspect the Holy Spirit knew that.

**9. The plan is consistent and persistent. If we don't like its ideas, it won't change its mind. And if at first we don't hear it, it will keep knocking.**

We often assume that the Holy Spirit's plan is incredibly fluid and spontaneous. It may tell us something one week and tell us something quite different the next. For instance, when I didn't get the message at first, we might assume that the plan would move on, flowing and adapting in the face of my resistance and coming up with an endless string of new, equally tentative ideas. This is a rather comfortable idea, but this was not my experience in this case (nor has it been in my other encounters with the Holy Spirit's plan). The fact that I didn't get it and was resistant didn't change a thing from the standpoint of the plan. It just kept insisting on the same idea until I came around.

**10. It is all right if we don't answer when the plan knocks. It will keep offering us more opportunities. They will never stop coming.**

I am convinced that it is *all right* if we don't hear the

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plan knocking, or hear it but refuse to answer. If the plan were like us it would get angry and eventually give up on us, but thankfully it is not. Being ever-patient and forgiving, it will simply continue to generously lay before us more and more opportunities, for as long as it takes.

Does God have a plan for our lives? In my experience, He does. This plan is on our side. It offers us the chance to

live for a meaningful purpose. It has our best interests in mind. Yet it also has the demise of our ego in mind, and it is hard for us to see that *this* is in our best interests. Therefore, the plan's ideas may be so alien to us that we at first may not notice them, and once we do we may kick and scream for a long time. But that is all right. The plan is patient and we will come around in the end. ☮

## Letters to the Editor

*Thank you for your letters to the Circle. We enjoy receiving them and sharing them with our readers. These letters are on a variety of topics, and include your letters to the editor of A Better Way, and your comments on our various services,*

*programs, publications, and on our website. Write us at P.O. Box 4238, W. Sedona, AZ 86340, or send us an e-mail at: [info@circleofa.com](mailto:info@circleofa.com). Letters may be edited for space and clarity.*

*Our last issue of A Better Way, in which we looked at the relationship between the Circle's teachings on the Course and the teachings of Ken Wapnick, elicited quite a response! Below is what we received before going to press with this newsletter. We will include more in the next issue, since most of the response came in after we had already typeset this one.*

Your recent newsletter on the relationship between the Circle's teachings and the teachings of Ken Wapnick is an instant classic. I believe the Holy Spirit needed the right time and the right channels (the Circle's staff) to share His message of hope for all of us, which is that He does do things within the world. Jesus' statement in the Course, "I will never leave you comfortless," will have a new and richer meaning for all Course students throughout the world!

**Ron Bevacqua**  
**Yorba Linda, California**



I would really urge you to place Issue #38 of *A Better Way* online, and make it wholly available to the ACIM community. The impact here in the Tucson area has been very great. Facilitators like myself are devoting much time to group study of the article which compares the two sets of teachings. It is stirring much interest, but most importantly it is a major clarification of Course study. Much love and thanks.

**Carl Banholzer**  
**Vail, Arizona**

Thanks for addressing this matter in so clear and forthright a manner. It seems clear to me that, paradoxically, both views are correct and that, in your terms, Jesus allowed both views to coexist in ACIM. This would fit with the view that in order to "climb the ladder" you must sincerely believe that Jesus and the Holy Spirit act in the world and in your mind. They would both need to be seen as real external agents (external to Self), real in their own right, given the force of the belief in separation. Yet, at a higher step on the ladder, such a view is seen as an impediment to the acknowledgement that separation never occurred and that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are themselves illusory projections.

Wapnick is representing the view of theological purity, and rightly so. The Circle is representing the view of practical efficacy, and rightly so. The Course represents both. The paradox is inevitable and provides no reason for conflict. It is quite OK. Let there be peace.

**Jeremy Stutsman**  
**By e-mail**

*(continued on page 10)*

*Editor: We have now posted this issue on our website. You will find it at [www.circleofa.com/articles/Big\\_picture.html](http://www.circleofa.com/articles/Big_picture.html)*

# COURSE Q & A

## Does denying the world mean totally denying that there is pain and suffering in this world?

by Greg Mackie

**Editor's note:** *The following is a slightly revised version of an article posted on the "Course Q & A" section of The Circle of Atonement's website (www.circleofa.com).*

**T-13.VII.2:1 says, "The world you see must be denied, for sight of it is costing you a different kind of vision." Does this mean that we should totally deny that there is pain and suffering in this world? How can we deny that people are in pain and need help?**

**Short answer:** There are two very different kinds of denial—which I will call *false denial* and *true denial*—and here as elsewhere, the Course is advocating true denial.

One form of false denial is denying that we have made mistaken, ego-based choices which have led to pain within the illusion, and thus call for help. True denial is denying the *ultimate reality* of those mistaken choices and the pain that comes from them, affirming that our true Self is totally unharmed by those choices. The goal of the Course's program is to get us out of falsely denying the painful effects of the ego *so that* we can practice true denial, the Course's means of healing pain and suffering in ourselves and others. This process enables us all to stop denying the truth about ourselves, restoring our awareness that we are the beloved creations of a loving Father, forever free of pain and suffering.



**One form of false denial is denying that we have made mistaken, ego-based choices which have led to pain within the illusion, and thus call for help.**

What is false denial? To deny something is to declare that thing untrue; *false denial*, then, is to declare something untrue that really *is* true, at least on some level. False denial is refusing to look at the truth because we think the truth threatens us in some way. It is the lie we tell ourselves to avoid the truth that we think will destroy us.

The primary form of false denial that the Course talks about is the ego's denial of our true Identity and everything that goes with It. Because the ego is "made out of the denial of the Father" (T-4.III.4:3), it must blot out of our awareness everything that reminds us of our Father, because if we remember the truth about ourselves, the ego will be "destroyed." It must deny the truth, and get us to deny the truth, in order to survive.

The ego blots out the truth about us by convincing us that we are limited, separate beings, vulnerable to pain and suffering inflicted upon us by an external world. And one

form of false denial the ego uses to keep us from recognizing what it is doing is the form that is the main focus of this Q & A: The ego gets us to deny (or at least minimize) the painful effects that choosing to listen to it has brought us. These effects are not ultimately true, of course, but they are "real enough in time" (T-3.VII.3:2), and the ego encourages us to deny this fact so that we won't see just how undesirable the ego is.

This refusal to look at the problems brought on by the ego is the kind of denial that is usually meant when people say, "You're in denial." It is sticking our head in the sand, pretending that we don't have a problem and don't need any help, despite all evidence to the contrary. Like an alcoholic who denies he has a drinking problem even as he loses his job, his wife and friends abandon him, and he lies face down in the gutter, this form of false denial is a misguided attempt to shield our awareness from the devastating effects of the ego even as it makes a train wreck of our lives. It is a defense mechanism which is used not to heal the problem, but to *conceal* it.

Just as we can use false denial to sweep *our own* problems under the rug, so we can use it to deny the pain and suffering in the outer world. We can turn away from the suffering people all around us and lose ourselves in

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**The ego gets us to deny the painful effects that choosing to listen to it has brought us.**

trivial pursuits. We can find all sorts of rationalizations to convince ourselves that things aren't really as bad as they seem. We can even, as Course students, blithely dismiss the world's pain by saying, "It's all an illusion, so it doesn't matter anyway."

But this kind of denial—either of our own ego-based suffering or that of others—is definitely *not* what the Course is advocating. The Course tells us that while delaying our awakening by listening to the ego will not cause us any *real* harm, such delay "is tragic in time" (T-5.VI.1:3). It tells us that anytime our brothers are not expressing love they are calling for help, and urges us to respond to their call by *giving* help. It even implores us to take an unflinchingly honest look at the world around us and ask ourselves if we are moved to do our part to heal the pain and despair surrounding us:

Look about the world, and see the suffering there. Is not your heart willing to bring your weary brothers rest? (W-pI.191.10:7-8)

Thus when the Course tells us to deny the world, it is not asking us to callously pretend that the suffering brought on by mistaken ego-based choices isn't happening *within the illusion*. That is false denial, which does nothing but hide the suffering, thereby ensuring that it will continue. The Course is talking about a very different kind of denial, which I will discuss below.

**True denial is denying the *ultimate* reality of those mistaken choices and the pain that comes from them, affirming that our true Self is totally unharmed by those choices.**

If false denial is to declare something untrue that really *is* true (at least on some level), then true denial is to declare something untrue that really is *untrue*. False denial refuses to look at the truth, denying that it is true; true denial looks straight at untruth, affirming that it is untrue. This is the kind of denial that the Course is advocating. One of the best discussions of true vs. false denial in the Course occurs in the first two paragraphs of T-2.II, which I recommend reading. The following lines from the second paragraph are a good description of true denial:

True denial is a powerful protective device. You can and should deny any belief that error can hurt you. This kind of denial is not a concealment but a correction. (T-2.II.2:1-3)

Notice the implied distinction between false and true denial here. What I am calling "false denial" is *concealment*, one form of which is the denial of the ego's painful effects that I discussed above. True denial, on the other hand, is a *correction* of the mistaken belief that our true Self can really be altered by our mistaken choices; it "denies the ability of anything not of God to affect you" (T-2.II.1:11). As we saw above, this doesn't mean denying the fact that error can be very painful within the illusion; instead, it means denying that what happens within the illusion has any effect on our *reality*. No matter what the appearance, our true Self is as pure, holy, complete, and perfect as the moment God created It.

Therefore, when T-13.VII.2:1 tells us that we must deny the world we see, it doesn't mean that we should literally not use our physical eyes (which would certainly make driving a car difficult), nor does it mean that we should pretend that the things our physical eyes behold aren't happening within the physical world. Rather, it means that we should deny the *reality* of those things. Believing in the reality of the things our physical eyes show us blocks the experience of *true* vision: the vision of Christ, a kind of seeing that "does not depend on the body's eyes at all" (W-pI.30.5:1). This is the vision that reveals to us the real world beyond the world of form. This line is saying, in essence, "Don't depend on the body's eyes to tell you what is real. They see only form, and so they can't see reality. If you want to see what is real, turn to true vision, for only true vision can show you reality."

Indeed, the Course tells us that even after we attain true vision, our physical eyes will continue to see the same things everyone else sees, as long as we remain in a physical body. The difference lies in how we *interpret* those things:

The body's eyes will continue to see differences....But the healed mind will put them all in one category; they are unreal. (M-8.6:1,4)

Even when our minds are healed, then, we will not deny that the choice to listen to the ego has produced a world of different forms which can be perceived by physical senses, a world which brings pain and suffering as long as we believe those differences are real. Jesus himself does not deny this, since he speaks of it so often in the Course. What we will deny, however, is the *reality* of this world of differences. We will see it, but we will also

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**It is not asking us  
to callously pretend  
that suffering isn't  
happening *within*  
the illusion.**

see beyond it to the truth beyond appearances, to our true Identity which remains forever untouched by those appearances. We will look straight at what is untrue, and affirm that it is untrue. This is true denial.

**The goal of the Course's program is to get us out of falsely denying the painful effects of the ego so that we can practice true denial, the Course's means of healing pain and suffering in ourselves and others.**

Turning away from our false denial of the ego's darkness and practicing true denial is the very essence of the Course's healing program, a program of "bring[ing] the darkness to the light" (T-18.IX.1:1) and allowing that light to "shine it away" (T-8.IV.2:10). In short, the Course's process of healing consists of two basic steps:

1. Getting out of false denial by bringing our illusions into the light of truth.
2. Undoing those illusions with true denial, allowing the light of truth to dispel them.

In other words, we must first look squarely at our illusions, and then deny the reality of those illusions with the help of the Holy Spirit or Jesus. Both steps are necessary. We must first look squarely at our illusions because we can't truly deny the reality of something that we're not even aware of: "No one can escape from illusions unless he looks at them, for not looking is the way they are protected" (T-11.V.1:1). The ego uses false denial to protect itself and its illusions from the light of truth, and so we must actively decide to bring our illusions out of hiding if we want to be healed.

But once we do so, we must then move to the second step, because it is only by denying our illusions' reality that we *are* healed. Once the illusions caused by our mistaken choices are brought out of hiding, we must refuse to hold onto our mistakes, and allow them to be undone by the Holy Spirit:

Having accepted the errors as yours, do not keep them. Give them over quickly to the Holy Spirit to be undone completely, so that all their effects will vanish from your mind and from the Sonship as a whole. (T-7.VIII.5:5-6)

Both steps, then, are equally important, for the first one sets up the second. Bringing our illusions into the light of truth allows that light to dispel them. The following passage is perhaps the Course's clearest statement of the

necessity of looking directly at our illusions (referred to here as *conflict*), and allowing them to be undone by the truth:

Conflict must be resolved. It cannot be evaded, set aside, denied, disguised, seen somewhere else, called by another name, or hidden by deceit of any kind, if it would be escaped. It must be seen exactly as it is, where it is thought to be, in the reality which has been given it, and with the purpose that the mind accorded it. For only then are its defenses lifted, and the truth can shine upon it as it disappears. (W-pII.333.1:1-4)

Getting out of false denial and practicing true denial is therefore the way to our own healing. But it is also more than that: It is the way we heal *others*. We have already seen above (especially in W-pI.191.10:7-8) that the Course wants us to look with unflinching honesty at the suffering in the world around us and be willing to help our brothers in need. And once we get out of false denial concerning the suffering of the world, the Course would have us heal that

suffering by practicing *true* denial: denying the ultimate reality of that suffering, and affirming that the true Self of everyone is totally untouched by that suffering.

This is the idea behind the Course's statement that "the task of the miracle worker [is] to *deny the denial of truth*" (T-12.II.1:5). In the context of the paragraph from which this line is taken, this statement means that a miracle worker—a person who extends miracles

of healing to others—has the function of denying *the miracle receiver's* denial of the truth (though of course the miracle worker must do this for herself before she can do it for someone else). This is how the miracle worker heals sick and suffering people. The person in need of healing is suffering because he has denied the fact that his true Self is whole and complete, forever beyond suffering of any kind. (Notice that this denial is the primary form of false denial mentioned above: the ego's denial of our true Identity.) The miracle worker undoes this denial by looking beyond this person's suffering to his true nature, and in so doing denying his denial of the truth about himself. This is true denial, the vision that shines the light of truth into his mind, healing him of his suffering.

What does this look like on a form level? Does this mean that the miracle worker goes around telling suffering people, "Your suffering is only an illusion"? I don't think so.

While there may be some instances where this is appropriate, I think such instances are probably extremely rare. Saying this to someone in pain would hardly be regarded by most people as loving, and the miracle worker is above all an extender of love. The miracle worker's job is to deny *in her mind* the reality of the other's suffering; the form through which this mental content is expressed should be left in the hands of the Holy Spirit or Jesus. They will guide the miracle worker to express the healed content of her mind in whatever way is most helpful to the miracle receiver.

Given most people's firm belief in the reality of their pain and suffering, I think that most of the time, the Holy Spirit will counsel miracle workers to help in a way that addresses and acknowledges that pain and suffering in a loving way. Denying the reality of what happens in the physical world doesn't mean that the miracle worker should do nothing physically to help suffering people. Such people usually need some sort of help on a form level, and giving that help when guided is simply the most loving thing to do. But whatever help the miracle worker gives on a form level, the key is that the *content* of her mind is healed perception, which acknowledges that painful mistakes have been made within the illusion, but

also recognizes that it *is* an illusion. It is this recognition that truly heals.

**This process enables us all to stop denying the truth about ourselves, restoring our awareness that we are the beloved creations of a loving Father, forever free of pain and suffering.**

This is the ultimate payoff of turning away from our false denial of the ego's darkness and practicing true denial. For the denial at the root of all our suffering—the falsest denial of them all, the one that began and still maintains the separation—is the denial of the glorious truth that we are “God's Son, complete and healed and whole, shining in the reflection of His Love” (W-pII.14.1:1). The false denial of our true Identity led to the ego; the false denial of the pain the ego has caused keeps the ego in place. But by fearlessly bringing the ego and its illusions out of the fog of false denial and allowing the sunlight of true denial to shine them away, all of us will remember the truth that we denied, and be free of suffering forever.

This may seem difficult, but the good news is that it is inevitable. No matter how long we persist in hanging on to denial, the truth cannot be staved off forever. In the end, “The awareness of truth cannot be denied” (T-12.I.10:3). 🌸

## Letters to the Editor

(continued from page 6)

I am reading Greg Mackie's article, “Does the Holy Spirit Actually Do Things in the World?” and am enjoying it immensely. I've studied (and striven to live) the Course for fifteen years, and have read nearly every word Wapnick has published. The Circle's works are truly wonderful contrasts to his views. Thank you for all you write and share!

**Brad O'Mara Ph.D**  
Spirit Lake, Iowa



Could it be that non-duality calls for an integration of transcendence and immanence in understanding the reality of God and Christ? I think that Ken Wapnick wishes to create a theology and do it in a thoroughly logical way. But it is surely less than logical to say that God is “wholly other” (transcendent) and yet closer to us even than we are to ourselves (immanent). Yet, over the centuries of the Judeo-Christian era,

tradition has insisted on both ways of looking at God, simply because that is the way that spiritual people experience Him. One finds this apparent dichotomy even in primitive religion.

“A universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is possible and even necessary.” If Mr. Wapnick desires the sort of rigid orthodoxy he seems to feel is required to preserve the Course, then it follows that he must establish a theology to which believers must adhere. And with that theology inevitably comes a lack of universality, as the Course indicates.

I thought that Mr. Mackie's article, “Does the Holy Spirit Actually Do Things in the World?” was very helpful. Thank you all at the Circle for your good work.

**Sara Nell Hayden**  
New Rochelle, New York

# A JOINT PORTRAIT OF JESUS

## Parallels Between the Jesus of History and the Author of *A Course in Miracles*

by Robert Perry

*A Course in Miracles* claims to be authored by Jesus through a human scribe. If this is really true, we would naturally expect to find parallels between the Jesus of history and the author of the Course. If those parallels are not there, how credible can the Course's claim really be? If they are there, they would give us a window onto the essential vision of a figure who has shaped our world perhaps more than any other. Yet in many ways the Jesus of the Course does not resemble the Jesus of the gospels. He does not, for instance, constantly highlight his exalted status and call us to believe in him, as he does in the Gospel of John. This disturbing lack of resemblance, however, changes when professional historians sift the gospels, trying to separate what is historically accurate from what is not. Many of their conclusions make the historical Jesus sound uncannily like the author of the Course. To demonstrate this, I have composed the following joint portrait (which is condensed from an article entitled, "Who Was the Jesus of History and Did He Write *A Course in Miracles*?" which can be found at the Circle's website at [http://www.circleofa.com/articles/Jesus\\_history\\_ACIM.html](http://www.circleofa.com/articles/Jesus_history_ACIM.html)). This portrait is based on my understanding of the Course and on the work of a particularly prominent Jesus scholar, Marcus Borg, author of *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* and *Jesus: A New Vision*. In what follows, every statement is meant to be true of both the Jesus of history and the Jesus of the Course. What emerges, in my opinion, is a portrait of an entrancing figure with a unique and challenging vision.

*Jesus is not the only-begotten Son of God sent to earth to die for our sins. Rather, he is one of us who, as a man, simply had an unusual degree of experiential contact with God. He says remarkably little about himself. Having found freedom himself, his only goal is to help us find it. To this end, he is primarily a teacher, one who is a master of words. What he teaches is not correct beliefs or right morals, but a way of*

*transformation. This way is a radical alternative to the world's conventional wisdom. His teachings therefore continually turn upside down our usual way of seeing life. They seek to transform our perception, so that we see the world through new eyes.*

*His teachings can be grouped into three great themes: I) a vision of ultimate reality, II) a diagnosis of the human condition, and III) a presentation of the way of liberation.*

*I. VISION OF ULTIMATE REALITY. In Jesus' view, reality is ultimately spirit, not matter, at the summit of which is God. The character of God is a crucial issue for Jesus. He criticizes our traditional religions because of their emphasis on a God who punishes. Instead, he sees God as the perfectly loving, attentive, caring, available father. Totally contrary to our ideas of how to treat people, with God there is literally no relationship between what we appear to deserve and how He actually responds to us. As a result, God showers His blessing on the just and unjust alike. He welcomes everyone, casting no one outside the circle of His love. He responds to all with the same unbridled love, even if they appear to deserve the opposite. Even when we believe we have earned His wrath, He embraces us and treats us as His beloved son.*

*II. DIAGNOSIS OF THE PROBLEM. Jesus' diagnosis of the human condition challenges our most cherished assumptions, for it says that the problem is not what we call evil, sin, and crime, but what we call the good life. He indicts our primary, "loving" relationships as being fundamentally self-serving. He takes aim at our preoccupation with material things, labeling it an idolatry which shuts out God. He denounces our love affair with gaining a special standing among others. And he criticizes the approach to religion which is about measuring up to the standards of a demanding*

  
**What emerges is a portrait of an entrancing figure with a unique and challenging vision.**

God. In all of these things, Jesus sees the workings of a profound selfishness. He sees an anxious, fearful self, one that is preoccupied with using the people and things around it to build its own safe and eminent identity. This whole effort is a substitute for simply receiving the sense of safety, worth, and love that comes freely from God.

III. WAY OF LIBERATION. The cure, according to Jesus, does not lie in simply behaving better on the outside. There must be a deep-level transformation. Our fundamental allegiance, the wellspring of our thoughts, feelings, and behavior, must undergo a revolution. Currently, we are centered in what we think of as our self. That self must be let go of, so that we can become truly centered in God. Out of this apparent death, we will feel as if we have been born again. Our natural reaction will be one of celebration and rejoicing. No more will we try to grab security and identity from the world, no longer will we be dependent on how things go on the outside, for we will be filled up by God's love from the inside.

This will free us to relate to others in a whole new way—in the same way that God relates to us. Just as with God, there will be no relationship for us between what others appear to deserve and how we respond to them. Even when they seem to deserve our hatred or indifference, we will be free to give them our undivided love. When they attack us without warrant, we will respond, not in kind, but with forgiveness, defenselessness, and generosity. When they are outcasts who seem undeserving, we will welcome them and draw them in, making them feel that they have come home. This will have a dramatic effect on them. Our love can perform miracles. We, in fact, can be the

beginning of a new kind of social pattern. We can become a place of refuge for those who feel broken and alone. The space around us can become a place of joy and celebration, a kind of ongoing feast to which everyone is invited. This space contains the beginnings of a new world, a world that reflects God. To help usher in this world is our function, for, as our teacher told us, we are the light of the world. ❧

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**The space around us can become a place of joy and celebration, a kind of ongoing feast to which everyone is invited.**

# A Healing Experience

by Nicola Harvey

A few of us here at the Circle felt that it may be interesting and helpful for me to share a healing experience with our readership. I decided to share with you a recent healing session that touched me very deeply. To me, what happened epitomizes what Course-based spiritual healing is all about.

In May we had our “Prayer” workshop here in Sedona, led by Robert. It was a wonderfully inspiring weekend, and the next day one of the participants (whom I shall call Eve) came to me for a healing session. Eve opened by telling me of her concern over a medical symptom that quite possibly had a serious physical cause. She had been referred to a specialist, but this meeting was not scheduled for nearly three months. In the meantime, Eve was filled with fear about what may be wrong with her, and having to wait for such a long time before anything was done was

placing a great strain on her. As she told me all this, Eve started quietly crying.

I reminded her of some of what we had been learning over the weekend: how our only true need was for God. When our minds, however, are filled with other apparent pressing needs, we not only lose sight of this one true need, but we can also feel alienated from God for *having* these other needs. Not only does God seem to diminish in importance by comparison, it can also seem as if we have been dumped by Him in our hour of need. Thoughts such as these—of desperately needing a certain outcome, or of anger at His holy indifference—can make it very difficult for us to turn to God in prayer in an open and genuine way.

I also reminded Eve of something else that was covered in the workshop, which was that we habitually decide for ourselves what our problem is, and then ask God to

respond within the boundaries we have set for Him. We effectively narrow down the range in which we will hear Him speak to us. His perspective of our needs is far wider than ours, and we are likely to have much deeper needs met if we don't define our problem so specifically, and instead simply ask Him what He would have us know.

I suggested that, at the start of the healing session, she reflect briefly on those ideas, and then focus on asking for God's Word (that was the focus of my lesson for the day, something I had already shared with Eve since it beautifully summed up the ideas I had been talking about). At the same time, she should try and release the thought that she knew what the problem was that needed solving. I told her I would do the same.

Eve lay down on my therapy couch, and I held my hands above her head, starting the process of lifting my mind to a state where these truths seem so real. Suddenly I received an inner picture. (These occasionally come to me spontaneously, and can be a useful source of guidance.) In this vision I was in a beautiful garden, and Jesus was approaching me from a distance. He was dressed in dazzling white robes, and he held a large, white envelope. When he reached me, he held the envelope out towards me and said: "Do you want to know the outcome, or do you want to know God's Love?" The outcome, of course, referred to Eve's situation with her health.

In the beauty of the moment, it seemed wildly inappropriate to ask to know the outcome, although I have to confess that afterwards I was filled with curiosity! However, at the time there was only one decision that made sense, which was the choice for God's Love.

For the rest of the session, that became my only focus. I just tried to open myself up to be a channel for God's Love to reach Eve. Each time I became aware that I was fearful or concerned for her, I let the thought go, and then focused on seeing her as a beautiful, radiant being. I saw us standing together, bathed in light, both of us released from our earthly fears and problems. Most of all, I focused on the love that was available to both of us, and really tried to reach out in my mind to this love, desiring the experience of it above all else.

Towards the end of the session I asked within if there was anything I should know, or should say to Eve. I just got the sense that I should say how loved and cherished by God she was. This was something that had felt very real to me during the session.

Afterwards, before sharing my experience with her, I asked Eve to share with me anything that seemed relevant from the session. She just started crying, and said that she was filled with an incredible joy, because she had genuinely had an experience of God's Love for her. She had sensed how deeply cared for by God she was. She had also felt this as a physical sensation—she felt her heart open up, and love pour into it.

I was really struck with how closely Eve's experience matched mine, which I then shared with her. She found it deeply comforting, especially as it so closely echoed what had happened to her. Our inner experiences had been so incredibly similar, both in content (God's overwhelming Love for Eve) and intensity, that it reinforced our sense that they were genuine experiences. This had an uplifting effect on both of us.

When Eve left, she looked like a different person than the one who had walked in less than an hour previously, and I felt truly blessed by the encounter.

**Postscript:** Eve has kept in touch with me, and she found out recently that there is nothing serious causing her symptom. During the remaining time of waiting to see the specialist, the memory of what happened in the healing session helped her in dealing with the inevitable fears that came up from time to time, and she even had one experience of her own which seemed like a kind of "flashback" of what she'd experienced in the session.

Eve's story is inspirational to me because it shows what potential there is in two people joining for the purpose of healing, and really applying the Course's teaching to a specific problem. I am always amazed when the Course's lofty theory has such wonderful practical results! This particular story was also inspiring for me because as Course students, we are so often bogged down with the theoretical aspects of understanding the Course, yet it was through applying theory that both Eve and I had such wonderfully loving experiences. ❧

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**There was only  
one decision that  
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God's Love.**

# A BASIC OUTLINE OF COURSE-BASED PSYCHOTHERAPY

by Robert Perry

I have wondered for years exactly what Course-based therapy actually is. Even after doing a class on *Psychotherapy: Purpose, Process and Practice* a few years ago I still did not have an overall picture. Instead, I felt like I had a pile of pieces, and I didn't know how they all fit together, and what that whole would look like once assembled.

In the Fall of 2000 I went through *Psychotherapy* again, along with the paragraph-by-paragraph commentary I wrote for that class. My goal was to try to assemble that whole picture. Even more specifically than that, I wanted to understand what the therapist did to bring about healing. To put this differently: What factors, when present, brought about healing? I was mostly focusing on factors on the therapist's side, things over which the therapist had some control.

I came up with four main aspects of Course-based therapy. These do not exhaust what *Psychotherapy* says about the enterprise of therapy, but they do seem to me to be the main things that the therapist tries to bring to the relationship. With these four aspects, I finally felt that I had a good feel for what this style of therapy actually is.

While this is specifically about Course-based psychotherapy, there is a no real line between formal psychotherapy and more informal relationships in which we try to be of help. These four aspects, therefore, apply to far more than scheduled sessions inside a therapist's office.

## ASPECT 1. THE BELIEF DOCTOR

The main thing the therapist will be doing in her discussion with the patient is working on the patient's belief system; that is, working to expose it, bring it up to question, and lead the patient toward choosing a different belief system through forgiveness.

### The patient's belief system

The patient's belief system is that he is a weak, vulnerable, insecure self which is at the mercy of a powerful, dangerous, attacking world. All of the power seems to lie in the world. The patient seems to have no

power to dictate his own responses, his own decisions, and his own emotions. What the world tells him about himself, he has to internalize. How the world treats him, he has to feel. The only way he can really exercise his power is to constantly defend himself from the onslaught of the world and to attack in

order to get what he wants. The world is not just going to give him what he wants, so he is forced to try and take it. In sum, the only option the world leaves him is to respond to it with defense and attack.

### The patient's "solution"

The patient does not want to question this belief system. He does not want to question the reality of the war he sees going on. What he wants is help in *winning* it. He wants to acquire new powers, skills, abilities, and strategies to meet the world on its own terms. He wants to form a new, confident self-concept that is equal to the task,

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**The patient  
wants to win at the  
game of life.**

that can hold at bay the world's attacking forces, that doesn't crumble in the face of the world's assaults and demands. He wants to become a confident, secure person able to manage his life and skillfully make his way through a treacherous world. He wants to win at the game of life. This is what he is hoping that therapy will do for him.

### **The flaw of the patient's "solution"**

The problem with the patient's solution is that it assumes the validity of his existing belief system, and within that belief system there *is* no solution. Within that system he will always feel like a vulnerable self at the mercy of a cruel world, a self *so* vulnerable that no defense will ever be truly sufficient. This strong self that can handle the world, therefore, will really be no more than a cover designed to hide how he really feels. Even if he becomes this capable self that is literally on top of the world, deep down he will still feel like the fragile self he was before. He will still be insecure. He will still live in fear.

### **The real problem**

The patient's real problem is guilt, which comes from his anger and resentment at the world. His belief system is one big argument for the fact that anger is justified. Its core assumption is that the world is attacking him, pressing on him, badgering him, making demands on him, treating him unfairly, not giving him his due. Given that belief, what else is he going to feel but anger—hidden, maybe, but surely present? And no matter how justified he tells himself this anger is, it *will* cause him to feel guilty. Because of his anger, he believes that he is an attacking self, an evil self, a sinful self. He believes he is guilty, and this belief says he deserves to suffer. His guilt, in fact, not the world, is the real source of all his suffering. All of his sorrow is an act of weeping for his own lost innocence. That the patient's real problem is guilt stemming from unforgiveness is very difficult to accept and to uncover. "This is never apparent to the patient, and only rarely so to the therapist" (P-2.II.3:4).

### **The therapist's job**

The therapist's job is to help the patient reconsider this belief system. This appears to be the primary work that

transpires between patient and therapist—what their talk is geared towards. The therapist helps the patient become aware that he sees himself at the mercy of the world, that he sees the world (its people, situations and events) as cause, and his mind (its emotions, decisions, responses) as effect. The therapist helps the patient question this cause and effect relationship; helps him accept that *mind* is cause and *world* is effect. The patient must learn that his mind is what's in charge. Since it has the freedom to *interpret* the world however it chooses, the world has no actual power over it. The therapist's job is to help the patient reclaim this power of the mind and use it to choose a new interpretation of the world.

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**The therapist  
helps the patient  
accept that *mind*  
is cause and  
*world* is effect.**

The power of the mind also implies a new view of the self. The patient sees himself as a weak, vulnerable, endangered self, but he must realize that this self is nothing but a mental construct. It is not his real self at all. It is just an image he made up with his mind, which is anything but weak.

The therapist must also help the patient uncover his guilt. The patient is continually singing a song of guilt to himself, the chorus of which says, "God may not enter here [because I am so guilty]" (P-2.VI.1:4). Yet even while he sings it, he doesn't hear himself singing it. This is because it takes disguised forms. The patient's song of blame towards the world is actually this very song of guilt, only in disguised form. Since blame causes guilt, while he sings "look what so-and-so did to me," he is really singing, "I am so guilty that God may not enter me." The therapist must help him hear this song of guilt he sings to himself. Usually, he will only hear it for brief moments. These moments give him a chance to question the song and "change his tune" (P-2.VI.2:2), something the therapist can't do for him.

How does he change his tune? He learns to forgive. This forgiveness, however, is not the same as conventional forgiveness. Conventional forgiveness is an unmerited gift bestowed on those who really injured us. This forgiveness, however, is based on the idea that the world didn't injure us at all. The world seemed to cause us pain, but all along

we caused our own pain, through how our minds interpreted the world. The world never hurt us. It never did anything to us. And if that is so, then our resentment toward it has no cause. This realization *is* forgiveness, a forgiveness that is the inevitable product of seeing the truth. It is not an undeserved gift.

This single choice to forgive is what heals the patient. When he forgives, he lets go of his picture of a fearful, threatening world about to blot him out. He realizes he made that picture up. Thus, his fear is gone. When he forgives, he no longer believes in a weak and vulnerable self. He realizes that his powerful mind made up *both* his view of the world and his view of himself. Such a mind is hardly weak and vulnerable. Most importantly, when he forgives, he is cleansed of guilt, because its source—his anger—is gone. Now he no longer sees himself as an evil self weeping over its corrupt nature and awaiting its just punishment at the hands of the world. That self, too, was just a mental construct. Forgiveness, therefore, is his entire healing.

## ASPECT II. FORGIVING THE PATIENT

This form of therapy aims, above all else, at releasing the patient from guilt. As we saw above, this happens through the patient's own choice to forgive others. Yet it also happens through the therapist's forgiveness of the patient.

While the therapist is engaged in the work of challenging the patient's belief system, she is also engaged in the inner work of challenging her own. She is looking on the patient and seeing his appearance as a sick, maladapted loser, filled with problems and clearly inferior to her. He is not only unsuccessful at life, he is not particularly good when it comes to being in therapy. He resists his own healing, fails to see obvious truths, refuses to make the right choices, and battles with his therapist. All things considered, it is sad to say that his secret belief that he is an unredeemable sinner appears to have some truth to it.

The therapist has to realize that this is an illusion; in fact, her own illusion. The patient's tendency to frustrate

her is a microcosm of her belief that the world is attacking her and causing her pain. This is the projection of her own guilt. She sees the patient as guilty and defective due to her attempt to unload her sins onto him. She sees him as vexing her and frustrating her because she sees him as the chosen instrument of the punishment she secretly thinks she deserves. And by seeing him in this unloving way, she reinforces her guilt.

Any lack of love, therefore, in how she sees her patient is her *own* song of guilt, in disguised form. This, in fact, is where she can get in touch with her song, question it, and change her tune. She does this by overlooking everything worthy of judgment, everything imperfect, in her patient. She sees past his sickness. She sees past his sins, recognizing that they are not real. She sees him as God's saint, as God's Own Son, as the bearer

of God to her. She sees something in him that is perfectly innocent and pure, despite all of his problems and mistakes.

This is what she is practicing inside herself while she is discussing her patient's belief system. The following passage speaks of this internal practice: "The process that takes place in this relationship is actually one in which the therapist in his heart tells the patient that all his sins have been forgiven him, along with his own" (P-2.VII.3:1). "In his heart" implies both "silently" and "with genuine sincerity." Another passage speaks in different terms about the moment when forgiveness occurs: "It is in the instant that the therapist forgets to judge the patient that healing occurs" (P-3.II.6:1). The implication here is that the therapist's judgment of the patient is a chronic, habitual thing which, even though it probably goes unnoticed, is constantly blocking healing. The moment when this chronic judgment is *not* maintained, healing occurs.

Both of the above passages say that healing comes from the occurrence of forgiveness inside the therapist. The therapist will of course express this forgiveness in many different ways on the outside. It is very doubtful that she will say, "Guess what? I just forgave you." But if the forgiveness inside is genuine, whatever she says will be a

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**Any lack of love  
in how she sees her  
patient is her *own*  
song of guilt.**

way of communicating this message: “Awake and be glad, for all your sins have been forgiven you” (P-3.II.4:10). The patient will probably experience this as feeling totally accepted and loved. This experience of being loved by his therapist, despite all his defects, is central to whatever healing he receives. His therapist’s love is how he is helped to “forgive himself for all the trespasses with which he would condemn himself without a cause” (P-2.V.7:6).

Genuine forgiveness from the therapist is so powerful that it doesn’t even necessarily need to be communicated visibly. It will transfer directly, mind-to-mind. In fact, the therapist’s patients will not always be people who meet her and come to her office. Sometimes they will be sent to her mentally from afar, by the Holy Spirit. In this case her job is to send them the healing power of her forgiveness, join with their minds across the distance, and trust that healing has occurred.

Even though the therapist’s forgiveness must occur privately, inside of her, it also has an active, external dimension. For the active process of therapy will uncover a great deal of ugliness inside the patient’s belief system. It will uncover a thought system filled with anger and rage, which is floating atop a sea of guilt. It will reveal selfish, aggressive impulses beyond what is considered socially acceptable. The ideal is for this dark, shame-producing material to be exposed and to meet directly with the unconditional absolution of the therapist.

In this sense, the therapist functions as a kind of confessor. Hopefully, the patient will in time want to bring to her his deepest, darkest secrets, all of the things that have led him to condemn himself. Her job, in the face of this material, is to offer her pure and undivided forgiveness, and through this offering help the patient truly accept that he did in fact “condemn himself without a cause” (P-2.V.7:6).

### ASPECT III. THE HOLY RELATIONSHIP

A primary healing agent is the therapeutic relationship itself. The patient’s unhealed self-concept is a result of his

antagonistic relationship with the world, and this relationship with the world is primarily contained in his conflict-ridden relationships with the people in his life. The therapeutic relationship is meant to be a more beneficent, healing relationship that shifts his perception of *all* relationships, and of himself in the process.

Therapist and patient are meant to enter into a holy relationship, a relationship in which real joining takes place. They have a joint project they are undertaking. The patient has asked for help and the therapist is trying to give that help. For their relationship to really come together, they have to unite in this joint project. They have to be working toward the same outcome, the same goal. The key to real joining is for therapist and patient to genuinely share a common goal.

Yet they typically begin therapy with divided goals. The patient wants to keep his belief system and self-concept completely intact and simply acquire ways to succeed in his perceived struggle with the world. The therapist generally wants to change the patient’s sick identity into a healthy one. Both will need to give

up these original goals and unite in the true goal of therapy: to help the patient undo his faulty self-concept and uncover his already innocent and pristine identity.

*Psychotherapy* suggests that the patient and therapist will need to go through a process of slowly reconciling their divided goals. Only these divided goals stand in the way of successful therapy. To the extent that the two of them can get past this division and unite in the same goal, they invite God into the relationship, even if they don’t believe in Him. Once He enters, He will direct the healing process and complete what they began. Because of His Presence, their limitations will in the end count as nothing.

It will be up to them, however, how much they draw upon the vast potential represented by God’s Presence in their relationship. Ideally, they will unite more and more over time (and will need the time to do this). They will share their common goal so fully that they will eventually lose sight of all separate interests. All of the differences that lie between them will slowly vanish from their sight. To achieve this ideal requires a very advanced therapist

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**Her job is to  
offer her pure  
and undivided  
forgiveness.**

(a term which is synonymous with an advanced teacher of God) who can facilitate such a holy joining.

A deep union of this sort profoundly changes the self-concept of both individuals. It proves to them that they are not the separate, vulnerable, guilty selves that they thought they were. It undoes their current self-concept and proves that their real identity actually includes the other person.

This joining between two people is God's plan for salvation. In the Course's path, we do not find sanity by meditating in a cave, but only by joining in a common goal with another. A joining between two distinct individuals is not the perfect oneness of Heaven, but it is the earthly reflection of that oneness. And therefore it is the way of return to that oneness.

#### ASPECT IV: THE EXAMPLE

The therapist's goal is to lead the patient out of his current belief system and into sanity. To do this effectively, the therapist must be a living demonstration of sanity, at least to some degree. She ought to be at least slightly less insane than the patient.

The patient is deeply afraid of really changing his belief system. He is profoundly threatened by the prospect of moving into real sanity. He believes that the loss of his self-concept means the loss of identity, which means death. Therefore, he will see the therapist as trying to take away his most sacred possession: his self-concept. As a result, he will resist the therapist's efforts and even attack the therapist.

The therapist's role is to respond to these attacks with defenselessness. This demonstrates to the patient another way of being, a way of being that is so secure that it doesn't need to defend itself. As a result, this way of being seems attractive. It seems safe. The patient starts to think that giving up his defensive, fearful state for the alternative embodied by the therapist may not be so scary after all. It may actually be a move toward safety and freedom from fear.

To approach this from another angle: The therapist can show the patient that his current way of thinking inevitably leads to suffering, but this doesn't help unless she can also help him accept the alternative. How does she do this? She presents an example of one who has moved into this alternative and lives there happily. She stands forth as someone who, at least to some extent, has let in the light, embodies the light, and is no longer trapped in the same fearful patterns. This kind of example, the Course tells us, "can speak with power greater than a thousand tongues" (T-27.II.5:8). This doesn't mean that her words are useless in communicating her message, but these words will have little power unless they are backed up by her life. As the Course says, "Words can speak of this and teach it, too, *if* we exemplify the words in us" (W-pII.14.2:5; emphasis mine).

Overall, the therapist is trying to coax the patient into a new way of thinking, one of which he is extremely wary. How can she really ask him to leave behind the familiar and step into the new unless she herself has done so? How will he be convinced that this way can work for him unless he sees that it has worked for her? The therapist, therefore, must above all be dedicated to her own journey to sanity. She cannot lead her patients there if she hasn't made the journey herself.

  
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#### Conclusion

This is just the barest outline of what the Course-based psychotherapist is supposed to do. Yet even from this brief sketch, two things are evident. First, this form of therapy, if the therapist is equal to it, will exert a profound transformative effect on the patient, from a number of angles at once. Second, in order to be equal to it, the therapist will need to possess tremendous skill, maturity, and love. Both of these make me want to see this form of therapy, complete with formal training for it, become a real discipline in the world. 

# Circle Mailbox

The articles on the Circle's website are offering me great relief and correction for some of my errors in following and teaching the Course. I had made an absolute commitment to applying the Course to everything that came my way as best I could, since 1995, when I first began it. And believe me, as open-minded to new beliefs as I thought I was, I encountered what seemed to me like impossibly unreasonable conflicts of mind. What a refreshing breeze I feel now as some of my past errors go away by learning from your articles. I am so glad to not feel alone.

**Dennis Allen**

By e-mail



## ***Some feedback on Greg Mackie's "Loving Behavior Matters" article:***

Let me first say that, yes, I agree, loving behavior is a very nice thing. However, it is a by-product of a healed mind, not the other way around. Saying "loving behavior matters" is putting the cart before the horse, and making a judgment about what you think a teacher of God should look like. What "matters" is changing your mind about what you want to see, and always choosing love—then a change in behavior would come naturally as a result. Behavior is merely a symptom of a healed or an unhealed mind.

The world is not a good judge on how others "should" behave. How many people approved of the way Jesus acted 2000 years ago? How come they couldn't tell that his behavior was loving? Are we a better judge of behavior today? Is this the direction the Course really wants us to go in—telling others that their behavior matters? Who is going to be the behavior judge?

**Sharon VandenToorn**

By e-mail

## ***Greg Mackie responds:***

*I wholeheartedly agree with Sharon that truly loving behavior is the effect of a healed mind, not the other way around. The point I was making in the article was simply that the loving behavior that extends from a healed mind is not just a nice by-product of the healed mind, but instead plays a vital role in the process of salvation described by the Course. It is true that outwardly "loving" behavior, in and of itself, cannot heal the mind. However, it is equally true that loving behavior that flows from a truly healed mind can communicate and thus reinforce the mental healing expressed by that behavior. This reinforcement completes the healing process, and this is why loving behavior matters. So, I believe that in the Course's view, what matters is both changing your mind and expressing that change of mind in a loving way, guided by the Holy Spirit.*

*The Holy Spirit is to be the "behavior judge," not any human authority. He knows the specific form our loving behavior should take, because He knows how we can best communicate our mental healing in a way that the recipient of that communication will understand as loving. That being said, there are certain behaviors that virtually everyone understands as loving, and so I think the Holy Spirit will tend to direct us to express our love in these forms. The majority of the examples of loving behavior I presented in the article were taken directly from the Course material itself. They represent Jesus' own vision of what the behavior of a teacher of God might look like. These behaviors—honesty, gentleness, generosity, and the like—are the kinds of behaviors he demonstrated in his earthly life. And if the huge throngs that followed Jesus were any indication, everyone except a small minority immediately recognized Jesus' behavior as the expression of an extravagantly loving mind.*

*In conclusion, I think this is definitely a direction the Course wants us to go: It wants us to recognize that extension of our mental healing in the form of truly loving behavior—becoming miracle workers like Jesus in thought, word, and deed—really does matter.*

***Editor:*** To view Greg's, and other articles, on the Circle's website, go to [www.circleofa.com](http://www.circleofa.com).

*The Circle of Atonement*  
**Mission Statement**

**To discern the author’s vision of *A Course in Miracles* and manifest that in our lives, in the lives of students, and in the world.**

**1. To faithfully discern the author’s vision of *A Course in Miracles*.**

In interpreting the Course we strive for total fidelity to its words and the meanings they express. We thereby seek to discover the Course as the author saw it.

**2. To be an instrument in Jesus’ plan to manifest his vision of the Course in the lives of students and in the world.**

We consider this to be Jesus’ organization and therefore we attempt to follow his guidance in all we do. Our goal is to help students understand, as well as discern for themselves, the Course’s thought system as he intended, and use it as he meant it to be used—as a literal program in spiritual awakening. Through doing so we hope to help ground in the world the intended way of doing the Course, here at the beginning of its history.

**3. To help spark an enduring tradition based entirely on students joining together in doing the Course as the author envisioned.**

We have a vision of local Course support systems composed of teachers, students, healers, and groups, all there to support one another in making full use of the Course. These support systems, as they continue and multiply, will together comprise an enduring spiritual tradition, dedicated solely to doing the Course as the author intended. Our goal is to help spark this tradition, and to assist others in doing the same.

**4. To become an embodiment, a birthplace of this enduring spiritual tradition.**

To help spark this tradition we must first become a model for it ourselves. This requires that we at the Circle follow the Course as our individual path; that we ourselves learn forgiveness through its program. It requires that we join each other in a group holy relationship dedicated to the common goal of awakening through the Course. It also requires that we cultivate a local support system here in Sedona, and that we have a facility where others could join with us in learning this approach to the Course. Through all of this we hope to become a seed for an ongoing spiritual tradition based on *A Course in Miracles*.

**Friends of the Circle**

**JOINING IN A COMMON VISION**

If the vision of the Circle presented in the Mission Statement on this page speaks to you, we invite you to join with us in it. Ask yourself: Is this a vision I want to see promulgated in the world? Is this something I want to give my support to? If so, perhaps you would like to become a “Friend of the Circle.” The annual benefits include:

**Category 1:**

<b>In U.S.:</b>	<b>Canada/Mexico:</b>	<b>Aust., NZ, SE Asia:</b>	<b>Other Countries:</b>
\$60/year	\$65/year	\$70/year	\$70/year
\$16/quarter	\$17.25/quarter	\$18.50/quarter	\$18.50/quarter

- Four-issue subscription to our newsletter, *A Better Way*
- Friends newsletter, updates and special reports, making you an informed partner
- Support in your study and application of the Course
- Special materials and handouts
- Feedback forms to share with us your ideas and concerns
- Opportunity to join us in our daily Workbook practice
- Contribution to our ongoing work and to the implementation of our vision and mission statement

**Category 2:**

<b>In U.S.:</b>	<b>Canada/Mexico:</b>	<b>Aust., NZ, SE Asia:</b>	<b>Other Countries:</b>
\$130/year	\$140/year	\$160/year*	\$148/year
\$33/quarter	\$35/quarter	\$40/quarter*	\$37.50/quarter

- Includes all of the above, plus an annual credit of \$70 U.S.(approx) towards materials, workshops, and retreats.

\* Please see *Publications Catalog* for details.

**ALL PRICES ARE LISTED IN U.S. FUNDS**

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**TO BECOME A FRIEND OF THE CIRCLE**

- Write us a paragraph or two about why you want to become a Friend. What about this speaks to you?
- Take a few moments to silently join with us in purpose.
- Enclose your initial payment/donation (U.S. Funds only).

If you are unable to afford the amount listed, see our Financial Policy on page 2.