

How A Course in Miracles Came

Reprinted from [Healing the Cause - A Path of Forgiveness](#) by Michael Dawson.

The way the Course came to be written illustrates very well the principles to be found within its pages. In 1957 William Thetford, a professor of medical psychology, was made Director of the Psychology Department at the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City. The following year he appointed [Helen Schucman](#), an associate professor of medical psychology, to head a research project. Although they worked well together professionally, their personal and departmental relationships were marked with much criticism, anger and blame. Each felt the other to be the cause of their unhappiness.

During 1965 Bill said to Helen that there had to be another way to relate to each other and within and between departments. Helen agreed with him and said she would help him to find it. This is an example of what the Course would call 'holy instant', where instead of holding on to a grievance, forgiveness is chosen instead. This shift of perception is what the Course calls a miracle.

The moment of joining between them was the moment that the Course was born. Helen soon began to experience dreams, visions and psychic experiences which she found very disturbing to her logical, rational and scientifically-oriented mind. Bill was very supportive towards her and managed to convince her she was not going mad. During the October of 1965 Helen 'heard' in her mind the words "This is a Course in Miracles. Please take notes." In desperation she rang Bill who tried to placate her and suggested she take down this inner dictation and bring it to the office the following day. He told Helen that if it was found to be nonsense, they could simply discard it and no one need ever know anything about it.

However, it soon became clear that the Course contained profound teachings and they could not easily dismiss it. For the next seven years, Helen continued to receive this inner dictation which she wrote down in shorthand. She said it was like having a tape recorder in her mind which she could start and stop at will, even in mid-sentence. Bill continued to support and encourage Helen in this process and would daily type the notes as Helen read them from her shorthand notebook.

The Course comes from Jesus, with much of it written in the first person. Several references are made to his life 2,000 years ago, especially with regard to his crucifixion which he describes in a very different light to what we have been taught to believe. Helen was shocked to realise who the source of this material was. At this time of her life she posed as an atheist. She had sought to find God in her early years but felt she had failed. She had retained an anger against a deity whom she felt had not made the same effort towards her. Her ambivalence towards God now extended to Jesus, with whom she maintained a love/hate relationship for the rest of her life. In the Course, Jesus tells us he understands that many of us experience difficulty in relating to him and that we need not believe he is the author of the Course to benefit from his words. (see M84; C-5.6)

The Course has been published as it was received except for the removal of material personal to Helen and Bill. The Text was received in one block and needed editing in the form of inserting chapter and section headings, punctuation, paragraphing and capitalisation. They were helped in this work by Dr. Kenneth Wapnick, a clinical psychologist. Ken tells the whole fascinating story of how *A Course in Miracles* was born in his book *Absence from Felicity - The Story of Helen Schucman and Her Scribing of A Course in Miracles*, published by the Foundation for *A Course in Miracles*. Bill looked upon his work with Helen as a sacred trust. The Course was the answer to their joint need for another way of relating.

Two further channelled writings came through Helen from Jesus in the form of pamphlets. The first was completed in 1975, three years after the Course was written. It is entitled *Psychotherapy: Purpose, Process and Practice* and is a summary of the Course's teachings on

healing as applied to the profession of psychotherapy. In 1977 Helen channelled *The Song of Prayer*. This was in response to questions Ken had raised about the correct use of prayer. It is a poetic summary of prayer, forgiveness and healing and deals with some of the misunderstandings that were already beginning to surface on these subjects. After Helen's death in 1981, a book of her inspired poetry was published by the Foundation for Inner Peace, entitled *The Gifts of God*.

It is a book about how to heal our minds, for this is where the source of all our physical and psychological suffering lies. The aim of the Course is for us to achieve a state of inner peace, a quiet joy, no matter what we are doing, who we are with, or where we may be. It does this by teaching us a new way of looking at the world. This change of perception is the miracle - hence the title of the book.

The Course teaches that everything in this world can be used as a mirror to what we believe. Our relationships are the most powerful of all our mirrors. By relationships I mean all forms: lovers, parent and child, therapist and client, employer and employee, friends, etc. A relationship is an extremely powerful way of bringing into our awareness what needs to be healed within our mind. The Course teaches that through forgiveness and turning within for help, we can undo all the guilt we carry. This guilt originates from the false belief in our unconscious mind that we have willed to separate ourselves from God, and have succeeded in this attempt. Guilt is the term the Course uses to describe our self-hate, feelings of inferiority, lack of self-worth and all the negative beliefs we have about ourselves. As we learn to undo our guilt, the memory of God's love for us will return to our mind. When we re-experience the unconditional love of God, everything in this world will lose its appeal, including our identification with our body.

The Course is a unique blend of modern psychology, radical metaphysics and deep spiritual truths. Much of the psychology is derived from Sigmund Freud's teachings on our ego defence mechanisms of denial. The three volumes comprising the Course are a lifetime study requiring much re-reading to benefit from the depths of its teachings. The metaphysics of the Course have many parallels with some Eastern philosophies and religions. There are over 700 references to the Bible, and Jesus often reinterprets these biblical sayings. Many Christian terms are used in the Course but with entirely different meanings. Jesus stresses that we are not guilty, sinful creatures who need to atone through sacrifice and suffering. Instead, he gives us the inspiring message that we are guiltless, sinless creations of God who have fallen asleep in Heaven. In our collective dream, we have forgotten the abstract eternal beauty of our real nature and believe we are bodies in a world of form.

The Course is not trying to convince us that it is the only spiritual path. It states that it is but one of many thousands of spiritual paths and that other teachers with different symbols are also needed. (M3; M-1.4:1-2) Jesus often says that the message of his Course is simple. However, when we first start to study it, it does not appear that way to most of us. This is because the Course's thought system is completely opposite to our ego's way of looking at the world. The Course uses the term 'ego' - as is also the practice in the East - to describe our 'little self' which we have made to try and take the place of our real Self which God created. Our ego identifies with our body whilst our Self (or Christ nature) knows only the truth of our formless, spiritual magnificence.

Jesus stresses that all God's children, referred to in the Course as the Son, Sonship or Christ, were created equal. Thus Jesus is not especially favoured in God's eyes but is equal to all of us. He simply awoke to his true reality before us and seeks to help us regain what we have forgotten.

The Text in particular seems hard to grasp and the practice of forgiveness equally as difficult. Because of this some people tend only to read the Workbook. However, there is much material in the Text, especially with regard to relationships, which is not found in the Workbook. The Text forms the theoretical foundation of the Workbook. It becomes very easy to misunderstand the Workbook and read its message out of context without a knowledge of the theoretical

framework of the Course which is found in the Text. On the other hand, to study the Text but not apply it through the Workbook lessons is to end up with an ungrounded and abstract view of the Course. Yet, with time, the message of the Course does become simple, although never easy to apply. Victim consciousness is ingrained in our psyches and the desire to blame others for our unhappiness is universal. To read in the Course that no one can take away our peace, only ourselves, is a difficult message to accept, but one which will eventually lead us to happiness.

The Workbook includes 365 lessons, one for each day of the year. It is not necessary, however, to do the lessons at that tempo, and one might want to remain with a particularly appealing lesson for more than one day. The instructions urge only that not more than one lesson a day should be attempted. The practical nature of the Workbook is underscored by the introduction to its lessons, which emphasizes experience through application rather than a prior commitment to a spiritual goal:

"Some of the ideas the workbook presents you will find hard to believe, and others may seem to be quite startling. This does not matter. You are merely asked to apply the ideas as you are directed to do. You are not asked to judge them at all. You are asked only to use them. It is their use that will give them meaning to you, and will show you that they are true.

"Remember only this; you need not believe the ideas, you need not accept them, and you need not even welcome them. Some of them you may actively resist. None of this will matter, or decrease their efficacy. But do not allow yourself to make exceptions in applying the ideas the workbook contains, and whatever your reactions to the ideas may be, use them. Nothing more than that is required." (Workbook, p. 2)

The Course makes no claim to finality, nor are the **Workbook** lessons intended to bring the student's learning to completion. At the end, the reader is left in the hands of his or her own Internal Teacher, Who will direct all subsequent learning as He sees fit. While the Course is comprehensive in scope, truth cannot be limited to any finite form, as is clearly recognized in the statement at the end of the **Workbook**:

"This Course is a beginning, not an end...No more specific lessons are assigned, for there is no more need of them. Henceforth, hear but the Voice for God...He will direct your efforts, telling you exactly what to do, how to direct your mind, and when to come to Him in silence, asking for His sure direction and His certain Word." (wbook, p. 487)

The summary introduction, which appears in its **Text**, is quite succinct and brief. It reads:

"This is a course in miracles. It is a required course. Only the time you take it is voluntary. Free will does not mean that you can establish the curriculum. It means only that you can elect what you want to take at a given time. The course does not aim at teaching the meaning of love, for that is beyond what can be taught. It does aim, however, at removing the blocks to the awareness of love's presence, which is your natural inheritance. The opposite of love is fear, but what is all-encompassing can have no opposite."

This **Course** can therefore be summed up very simply in this way:

"Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God."

This introduction is how **A Course in Miracles** begins. It makes a fundamental distinction between the real and the unreal; between knowledge and perception. Knowledge is truth, under one law, the law of love or God. Truth is unalterable, eternal, and unambiguous. It can be unrecognized, but it cannot be changed. It applies to everything that God created, and only what He created is real. It is beyond learning because it is beyond time and process. It has no opposite; no beginning and no end. It merely is.

The world of perception, on the other hand, is the world of time, of change, of beginnings and endings. It is based on interpretation, not on facts. It is the world of birth and death, founded on the belief in scarcity, loss, separation, and death. It is learned rather than given, selective in its perceptual emphases, unstable in its functioning, and inaccurate in its interpretations.

From knowledge and perception respectively, two distinct thought systems arise which are opposite in every respect. In the realm of knowledge no thoughts exist apart from God, because God and His Creation share one Will. The world of perception, however, is made by the belief in opposites and separate wills, in perpetual conflict with each other and with God. What perception sees and hears appears to be real because it permits into awareness only what conforms to the wishes of the perceiver. This leads to a world of illusions, a world which needs constant defense precisely because it is not real.

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When you have been caught in the world of perception you are caught in a dream. You cannot escape without help, because everything your senses show merely witnesses to the reality of the dream. God has provided the Answer, the only Way out, the true Helper. It is the function of His Voice, His Holy Spirit, to mediate between the two worlds. He can do this because, while on the one hand He knows the truth, on the other He also recognizes our illusions, but without believing in them. It is the Holy Spirit's goal to help us escape from the dream world by teaching us how to reverse our thinking and unlearn our mistakes. Forgiveness is the Holy Spirit's great learning aid in bringing this thought reversal about. However, the Course has its own definition of what forgiveness really is just as it defines the world in its own way.

The world we see merely reflects our own internal frame of reference—the dominant ideas, wishes and emotions in our minds. "Projection makes perception" (Text, p. 445). We look inside first, decide the kind of world we want to see and then project that world outside, making it the truth as we see it. We make it true by our interpretations of what it is we are seeing. If we are using perception to justify our own mistakes—our anger, our impulses to attack, our lack of love in whatever form it may take—we will see a world of evil, destruction, malice, envy and despair. All this we must learn to forgive, not because we are being "good" and "charitable," but because what we are seeing is not true. We have distorted the world by our twisted defenses, and are therefore seeing what is not there. As we learn to recognize our perceptual errors, we also learn to look past them or "forgive." At the same time we are forgiving ourselves, looking past our distorted self-concepts to the Self That God created in us and as us.

Sin is defined as "lack of love" (Text, p. 11). Since love is all there is, sin in the sight of the Holy Spirit is a mistake to be corrected, rather than an evil to be punished. Our sense of inadequacy, weakness, and incompleteness comes from the strong investment in the "scarcity principle" that governs the whole world of illusions. From that point of view, we seek in others what we feel is wanting in ourselves. We "love" another in order to get something ourselves. That, in fact, is what passes for love in the dream world. There can be no greater mistake than that, for love is incapable of asking for anything.

Only minds can really join, and whom God has joined no man can put asunder (Text, p. 356). It is, however, only at the level of Christ Mind that true union is possible, and has, in fact, never been lost. The "little I" seeks to enhance itself by external approval, external possessions, and external "love." The Self That God created needs nothing. It is forever complete, safe, loved, and loving. It seeks to share rather than to get; to extend rather than project. It has no needs and wants to join with others out of their mutual awareness of abundance.

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The special relationships of the world are destructive, selfish, and childishly egocentric. Yet, if given to the Holy Spirit, these relationships can become the holiest things on earth—the miracles that point the way to the return to Heaven. The world uses its special relationships as a final weapon of exclusion and a demonstration of separateness. The Holy Spirit transforms them into perfect lessons in forgiveness and in awakening from the dream. Each one is an opportunity to let perceptions be healed and errors corrected. Each one is another chance to forgive oneself by forgiving the other. And each one becomes still another invitation to the Holy Spirit and to the remembrance of God.

Perception is a function of the body, and therefore represents a limit on awareness. Perception sees through the body's eyes and hears through the body's ears. It evokes the limited responses which the body makes. The

body appears to be largely self-motivated and independent, yet it actually responds only to the intentions of the mind. If the mind wants to use it for attack in any form, it becomes prey to sickness, age, and decay. If the mind accepts the Holy Spirit's purpose for it instead, it becomes a useful way of communicating with others, invulnerable as long as it is needed, and to be gently laid by when its use is over. Of itself it is neutral, as is everything in the world of perception. Whether it is used for the goals of the ego or the Holy Spirit depends entirely on what the mind wants.

The opposite of seeing through the body's eyes is the vision of Christ, which reflects strength rather than weakness, unity rather than separation, and love rather than fear. The opposite of hearing through the body's ears is communication through the Voice for God, the Holy Spirit, which abides in each of us. His Voice seems distant and difficult to hear because the ego, which speaks for the little, separated self, seems to be much louder. This is actually reversed. The Holy Spirit speaks with unmistakable clarity and overwhelming appeal. No one who does not choose to identify with the body could possibly be deaf to His messages of release and hope, nor could he fail to accept joyously the vision of Christ in glad exchange for his miserable picture of himself.

*Christ's vision is the
Holy Spirit's gift.*

Christ's vision is the Holy Spirit's gift, God's alternative to the illusion of separation and to the belief in the reality of sin, guilt, and death. It is the one correction for all errors of perception; the reconciliation of the seeming opposites on which this world is based. Its kindly light shows all things from another point of view, reflecting the thought system that arises from knowledge and making return to God not only possible but

inevitable. What was regarded as injustices done to one by someone else, now becomes a call for help and for union. Sin, sickness, and attack are seen as misperceptions calling for remedy through gentleness and love. Defenses are laid down because where there is no attack there is no need for them. Our brothers' needs become our own, because they are taking the journey with us as we go to God. Without us they would lose their way. Without them we could never find our own.

Forgiveness is unknown in Heaven, where the need for it would be inconceivable. However, in this world, forgiveness is a necessary correction for all the mistakes that we have made. To offer forgiveness is the only way for us to have it, for it reflects the law of Heaven that giving and receiving are the same. Heaven is the natural state of all the Sons of God as He created them. Such is their reality forever. It has not changed because it has been forgotten.

Forgiveness is the means by which we will remember. Through forgiveness the thinking of the world is reversed. The forgiven world becomes the gate of Heaven, because by its mercy we can at last forgive ourselves. Holding no one prisoner to guilt, we become free. Acknowledging Christ in all our brothers, we recognize His Presence in ourselves. Forgetting all our misperceptions, and with nothing from the past to hold us back, we can remember God. Beyond this, learning cannot go. When we are ready, God Himself will take the final step in our return to Him.

To the Holy Spirit, there is no order of difficulty in miracles. This is familiar enough to you by now, but it has not yet become believable. Therefore, you do not understand it and cannot use it. We have too much to accomplish on behalf of the Kingdom to let this crucial concept slip away. It is a real foundation stone of the thought system I teach and want you to teach. You cannot perform miracles without believing it, because it is a belief in perfect equality. Only one equal gift can be offered to the equal Sons of God, and that is full appreciation. Nothing more and nothing less. Without a range, order of difficulty is meaningless, and there must be no range in what you offer to your brother.

Come therefore unto me, and learn of the truth in you. The mind we share is shared by all our brothers, and as we see them truly they will be healed. Let your mind shine with mine upon their minds, and by our gratitude to them make them aware of the light in them. This light will shine back upon you and on the whole Sonship, because this is your proper gift to God. He will accept it and give it to the Sonship, because it is acceptable to Him and therefore to His Sons. This is true communion with the Holy Spirit, Who sees the altar of God in everyone, and by bringing it to your appreciation, He calls upon you to love

God and His creation. You can appreciate the Sonship only as one. This is part of the law of creation, and therefore governs all thought.

The ego analyzes; the Holy Spirit accepts. The appreciation of wholeness comes only through acceptance, for to analyze means to break down or to separate out. The attempt to understand totality by breaking it down is clearly the characteristically contradictory approach of the ego to everything. The ego believes that power, understanding and truth lie in separation, and to establish this belief it must attack. Unaware that the belief cannot be established, and obsessed with the conviction that separation is salvation, the ego attacks everything it perceives by breaking it into small, disconnected parts, without meaningful relationships and therefore without meaning. The ego will always substitute chaos for meaning, for if separation is salvation, harmony is threat.

Only appreciation is an appropriate response to your brother. Gratitude is due him for both his loving thoughts and his appeals for help, for both are capable of bringing love into your awareness if you perceive them truly. And all your sense of strain comes from your attempts not to do just this. How simple, then, is God's plan for salvation. There is but one response to reality, for reality evokes no conflict at all. There is but one Teacher of reality, Who understands what it is. He does not change His Mind about reality because reality does not change. Although your interpretations of reality are meaningless in your divided state, His remain consistently true. He gives them to you because they are <for> you. Do not attempt to "help" a brother in your way, for you cannot help yourself. But hear his call for the Help of God, and you will recognize your own need for the Father.

Littleness versus Magnitude T-15.III.8. Is it a sacrifice to leave littleness behind, and wander not in vain? It is not sacrifice to wake to glory. But it is sacrifice to accept anything less than glory. Learn that you must be worthy of the Prince of Peace, born in you in honor of Him Whose host you are. You know not what love means because you have sought to purchase it with little gifts, thus valuing it too little to understand its magnitude. Love is not little and love dwells in you, for you are host to Him. Before the greatness that lives in you, your poor appreciation of yourself and all the little offerings you give slip into nothingness.

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