***A Course in Miracles*:
A Hope-filled Spirituality**

Excerpts from two Workshops held at the
*Foundation for A Course in Miracles*
Temecula CA

*Kenneth Wapnick, Ph.D.*

**Part I**

**Question:**
I come here to classes and listen to you, I read the Course, and I try to the best of my ability to practice it but, boy, I am becoming more aware of how much I don't want to do it. I'm a projection machine and I'm serious about it. Sometimes I lose hope and then begin to doubt that we can get to that decision maker and choose another DVD. Really, can we do that? Or are we doomed to live this DVD for the rest of our lives and just become aware that it is a DVD, instead of choosing peace and choosing to be loving? There's lots of high pressure in my job at the moment, a lot of anxiety, and I don't know how *not* to choose that. It sometimes gets a bit hopeless.

**Ken:** I think everyone would agree with what you are enunciating. Everyone has that experience. Most people come to the Course because their lives aren't working but they are not aware of just how bad things are until they start working with this material. And that is because the world does offer hope. There's always something: another relationship, another bank to rob without getting caught, a drug, alcohol, etc. There are things to distract us, but when we really start to understand what the Course is saying, we become more anxious. We recognize that there really is no hope within the ego system, that it is an all-powerful thought system, made all-powerful because we like it.

This can be very disconcerting on our good days and downright hopeless on other days. Yet, we cannot get to the light without going through the darkness. That is a major theme in this course. Jesus says that together we hold the lamp that will dispel the ego (T-11.V.1:3). That means looking at the ego, and some of the descriptions of the ego in this course paint a horrifying, very scary picture. What makes it worse is realizing it is talking about *us*. There are some very powerful sections that talk about flesh ripped from bone (T-24.V.4:8), throwing your brother over the precipice (T-24.V.4:2), and choosing to suffer so someone else will be killed (T-31.V.15:10).

These kinds of descriptions are not easy to process and can result in feelings of hopelessness. The hope lies in understanding—which is one of the reasons that I always stress the metaphysics—that there is a reason for our feeling that way. The reason the world is so hopeless is that when we identify with our bodies there truly is no hope. We think we are free when we die, but the Course says, "There is a risk of thinking death is peace" (T-27.VII.10:2). Then, before we know it, we are right back here again or in another aspect of the dream. There is no hope within the world. There is no hope within the illusion because once we identify with the illusion, we will not see anything else. It takes time and a great deal of discipline to begin to understand the world is not what it seems.

I frequently say, "Do not believe the lie" and "Do not believe those who tell you two and two is four" because they are coming from a belief that there are logical laws in this world that hold, when the fact of the matter is that any sane person knows two and two is five because nothing here makes any sense. Beginning to understand that is extraordinarily helpful because at least it gives us a meaningful lifeline.

The world offers lots of lifelines, all kinds of addictions. There is a very powerful section near the end of the text called "The Real Alternative," which says that every road here leads to death (T-31.IV.2:11). There is no hope in the world! I sometimes have said that *A Course in Miracles* is the only spirituality I know that offers true hope in the sense that it does not offer any hope of change in the world. The hope the Course offers is its teaching that everything that seems to happen here is happening in our decision-making mind. That is where the hope is, but the problem is we don't see any alternative, which is what this question is articulating, and that's true. The ego's truth begins to break down when we recognize that the ego is hopeless and seems all-powerful only because we believe in it. That is when we begin to have a semblance of hope, which then can grow and grow, but it should not be directed toward making the world work better for us. Recall the line, ". . . seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world" (T-21.in.1:7), meaning we have power over it.

And so you could have a very stressful period at work and even if you are not able to choose peace, you could at least know on some level that you *could* choose peace. You could go to your job and do whatever you have to do and take whatever guff you have to take but you could still be peaceful. At least knowing that is a possibility would give you a sense of hope. It also helps to be aware that feelings of hopelessness and despair represent a decision.

It takes a lot of work, a lot of study of what the Course is saying to be able to integrate this in our lives so that we begin to see that, yes, I do not have to be upset, and while this may not be the happiest thing to have happen to my body, I could still be at peace. It takes work! But it does pay off because then we will not labor under the illusion that something here is going to make us happy: I will finally find the right relationship, the right job, the right climate, the right body-build—whatever will make me feel good about myself and make me happy. We now realize that none of that will work. We are all old enough now that we know. We have tried so many different things in the world and they just do not work.

The reason *A Course in Miracles* will work is that it will lead us from the body to the mind, from the symbol to the source. We have control over that. The beginning of Lesson 70 clearly states how nothing in the world can make us happy or unhappy; nothing in the world can give us pain or pleasure. It then says this puts us in charge of the universe where we belong—we are in control of the universe of the mind whether we are happy or sad (W-pI.70.2:3). This has nothing to do with outer circumstances. Even if we don't experience that, at least knowing it intellectually is a very good start because it restores power to us. Otherwise we are all powerless and doomed to eke out a modicum of power. We think we can control a part of our lives or a particular person sometimes, but what we really believe is that we are at the mercy of forces we cannot control, especially the forces of aging and economics. Things happen: people lose their jobs and their homes, and they did not do anything. That's just how it is today, our thinking goes. Or, we get cancer or a loved one gets cancer, and on the level of the world, we do not have control over that, but we do have control over how we see it.

The line that says the world we see is an "outside picture of an inward condition" (T-21.in.1:5) gives us the way out. The world we see is a projection, a symbol of an inward condition, which is the mind's decision for the ego or the Holy Spirit—the power to choose. That gives us hope that even in the midst of horrendous circumstances we could still be at peace. At first we believe it intellectually or we work toward believing it intellectually. At some point if we keep working at it, it will become more of an experience, but it takes a lot of hard work because we are unlearning a lifetime, if not lifetimes, of dedication to making the symbol real and forgetting about the source.

The question also reflects, even though it didn't mention this, the resistance we all have to accepting that what I am saying and what the Course is saying is true. The world seems to be such a powerful witness. As Wordsworth said, "The world is too much with us." It is too powerful. Sickness is too powerful. The financial situation in the world is too powerful. War is too powerful. Disease is too powerful. Death is too powerful. We cannot overcome any of that; on the level of the body, we can't. But we *can* overcome our belief system because we have the power to change it. That is where the hope lies.

Is it *really* possible? Yes, it is really possible. I would tell you that you could even do it this afternoon, but that would throw you into a panic, so I won't say that.

**Part II**

Let us look at a lesson that is a nice way of saying all this: Lesson 284 "I can elect to change all thoughts that hurt." What this implies is that it is not the world that hurts us; it is not our job or our boss that hurts us; it is not our special relationship that hurts us; it is not the body that hurts us. It is our thoughts that hurt us, which is what Lessons 5 and 34 tell us: "I am never upset for the reason I think." "I could see peace instead of this." Here is what Lesson 284 says:

**(W-pII.284.1:1) Loss is not loss when properly perceived.**

The world always judges loss in terms of the body: I am losing my health, my vitality, my youth, my happiness, my job, my money, my loved one, my house. There is always loss that is externalized. When we properly perceive loss, we realize we cannot lose anything out there. There is nothing out there, and any perception of loss comes from our mind's belief in it, which we can change: "I can elect to change all thoughts that hurt."

**(W-pII.284.1:2-4) Pain is impossible. There is no grief with any cause at all. And suffering of any kind is nothing but a dream.**

In other words, the world does not make us suffer. Suffering is part of the ego's dream. Now comes a very important passage to keep in mind, because it helps us remember this is a process:

**(W-pII.284.1:5-6) This is the truth** [i.e., everything here is an illusion; pleasure and pain are illusory]**, at first to be but said and then repeated many times** [probably many, many, many times, but that would screw up the meter so there is only one "many"—I am sure Helen heard "many, many, many times"]; **and next to be accepted as but partly true, with many reservations. Then to be considered seriously more and more, and finally accepted as the truth.**

This is a very clear statement of the process that every student of A Course in Miracles goes through. We read the words and we say they are nice, maybe even pretty, and we would like to believe them, but we have reservations: We can see this working in some cases, but not others, in some relationships or illnesses, but not others: with a headache but not with cancer. We object: "But I have a mortgage payment due!" So then we say the words over and over again. We keep reading them and listening to them. Then we accept them partially, still with a lot of reservations. Then we begin to think about them more and more seriously. Then finally we accept them as the truth. What convinces us to accept them as the truth is not the words. What convinces us is our own experience. We begin to see on the level of form that what we are going through may be horrendous, but we can still be peaceful. Thus, someone may have said something very unkind to me, but I don't have to take it personally. We begin to practice that more and more, and see it more and more. "Frightened people can be vicious" (T-3.I.4:2). People act viciously toward us, but they are as frightened as we are. We need to ask ourselves "Why do I have to be part of their dream?"

There is an important section in Chapter 28 called "The Agreement to Join" (T-28.III). The context is sickness and Jesus tells us not to accept our brother's dream of sickness (T-28.III.3:3), which does not mean that we become insensitive to someone else's suffering; we do not laugh it off or become unkind. It means we do not lose our peace, which actually will make us much more caring and considerate because there will be no conflict, guilt, or fear to interfere with our being a free expression of love.

This is something we can practice. When someone says something unkind, we do not have to be part of that person's dream. But if we get upset we are saying, "Yes, you're right. The dream of separation is real and it is peopled with victims and victimizers; I feel sorry for the victims and I hate the victimizers." We could step back from that and recall that if we are all the same, then victimizers deep down believe they have been victims and the only way they can deal with their pain is to go on the offensive. Again, "Frightened people can be vicious." Every victim is a silent victimizer pointing an accusing finger that says, "Behold me, brother, at your hand I die" (T-27.I.4:6).

Later, the text says, "And in your suffering of any kind you see your own concealed desire to kill" (T-31.V.15:10). I have always said that that is the most difficult passage in the whole book for people to really look at. "And in your suffering of any kind, you see your own concealed desire to kill." We want  to suffer so someone else will be held accountable. We exist but it is not our fault, and God will punish and destroy the other person. An earlier parallel passage says that our brother's sins are "writ in Heaven . . . and go before him . . . ." (T-27.I.3:2). Our suffering tells God to look at that person's sins, which are writ in Heaven and go before him, meaning they lead him down to hell where he will be punished. And since it is one or the other, if you are in hell, I must be in Heaven.

Understanding this gives us something to call on when we are in the midst of situations that are painful or horrific, which we all are in almost all the time. We can say and mean, "I could see peace instead of this." To restate this important point, this does not mean that we excuse people's unkind behavior or cruelty. It just means that we do not attack it. They are frightened people, but everyone is frightened and therefore everyone has vicious thoughts and feelings, and acts viciously. Most of us would not rob banks, or rape, or kill innocent people, or drop bombs on villages and be glad about it: "Oh, this is a good day. I killed a hundred and fifty people and most of them were women and children—they had it coming to them!" Most of us would not do that, but we all would do it on some level. We may not do it in form, but when we are glad that the local rapist has been caught and severely punished, if not killed, we are no different from the rapist. We are saying that someone else's suffering is my pleasure. Well, isn't that what a rapist does? The rapist is saying, "I don't care about you. I just want my pleasure." Well, we want the pleasure of knowing the guilty bastard is getting killed and not us. We derive great pleasure from that, as we all know. Just observe a family whose child has been killed; observe them outside the courtroom when the verdict has been given and the one who killed their child or raped and killed their daughter is going behind bars and will never get out. They are so ecstatic. Justice has been done! Hell, injustice has been done because there is no love there! Love does not punish. Love may place a limit on people's ability to miscreate, but it would never be done in a spirit of punishment.

We are all silently glad when the victimizer gets caught. That makes us no better than the victimizer. That is what we must see. Do not confuse symbol with source. On the level of the symbol, we are all very, very different. On the level of the source, which is the separated mind, we are all the same. We are all secret Hitlers and Stalins. We are all killers. We are all secret Jesus's or Buddhas because we all have right minds. We are all the same. Everyone has a right mind—everyone. If we exclude one person, we are excluding the whole Sonship, because what makes the Sonship the Sonship is that it is unified. We are all one. That is a very sobering thought.

I frequently say that if you want to see how far you have come with this course, just look at a judgment that you make and ask yourself whether you would make this judgment about everyone in the Sonship. Take any unkind thought that you have of anyone and ask whether you would extend it to embrace everyone, including Jesus and the people here that you love. The chances are that you would say "No. Jesus never raped anyone. He never built a bomb and dropped it on innocent people in a village." By judging and thinking unkindly of others, what we are doing is differentiating and fragmenting the Sonship. We are saying that there is a hierarchy of illusions, which as we have seen, is the first law of chaos (T-23.II.2:1-2). We are saying there are people here who are different from other people.

People are different on the level of form, but not on the level of mind. Do not confuse symbol with source.Symbols are differentiated, unless we make them right-minded symbols, which then embrace everyone. Thus, if you have a wonderful, beatific experience in the presence of a great work of art or a great nature scene and you will not allow that love to embrace everyone, then you are negating the beauty of that experience. You are saying that you can have a wonderful experience of God's Love in whatever form it may take, but you cannot take it home with you because you have all these screaming kids interrupting your peace; or you cannot take it into the workplace; or you cannot take it with you when you watch the news.

When we think like that, we are taking the experience of love and limiting it, which means it is no longer love. Having an unkind thought or doing an unkind thing does not make us sinners, but it does say that we still value, affirm, and witness to the reality of the separation, the reality of the fragmentation, which is saying there is a hierarchy of illusions—that there are good and bad people in this world. It is true that there are people we judge as good who do good things in our estimation, and people we call bad who do bad things in our estimation. Yet not everyone would agree with our evaluation, which means it is not universal, and if it is not universal, it is not real.

**Part III**

The lie of the world is that symbols mean something, and the meaning is that they differentiate. That is the lie of symbols. That is the meaning symbols have for the ego. The purpose of any symbol is to bring us back to the source. If it is the wrong-minded source, then we want to change our minds. If it is the right-minded source, then we want to strengthen it and share the love that comes from that right-minded decision. That is what makes this course so difficult. There is a section called "Salvation without Compromise" (T-23.III). If we truly want to be saved, which means saved from our decision for guilt, we must include everyone in our decision. This course is uncompromising. The tone of it is very gentle, and the experience of Jesus as our teacher is very loving, kind, and patient, but he is uncompromising. Jesus told Helen in a message, which is really for all of us: "I will love you and honor you and maintain complete respect for what you have made, but I will not uphold it unless it is true" (T-4.III.7:7). He does not uphold anything we say or believe. This course negates everything we think is true. Jesus respects what we think because it comes from the power of our decision. If we do not respect the power of our decision to choose the ego, we will never respect that power to choose the Holy Spirit, but Jesus will not uphold our choice for the ego because it is not true.

This course is uncompromising in that way. It is sweet, gentle, loving, and kind, but is it ever uncompromising and clear! Many students are tempted to fudge it, thinking that Jesus doesn't really mean what he says, or they fudge it by ignoring certain things they read. So when Jesus tells us our eyes don't see, we will make believe we didn't see that. Right, got it? Eyes don't see. We will make believe we don't see the statement that says our eyes don't see. We will see what we want to see.

Thus, in practicing this course, we should still share the kindness and gentleness of our teacher, but we should be uncompromising in not attributing cause to anything external. We are never upset for the reason we think (W-pI.5). We think we are upset because .... And we all have a long list of "becauses." We can just as easily say we think we are happy because ... which means we are never happy for the reasons we think. The world lies. The world was made to lie. "Nothing so blinding as perception of form" (T-22.III.6:7). Form lies. It blinds us. The symbol blinds us to the source. That is why: "Nothing so blinding as perception of form." That is why we should not believe people who tell us that two plus two is four. They don't understand. They may help us with a bodily problem, but they will not help us get home. They may offer a particular form of magic that will help alleviate pain, or they may tell us how to get from place A to place B. There is nothing wrong with that, but it won't get us home. What will get us home is asking help of someone, but not taking the help seriously. We take the help seriously on the level of its effect on our body or the body of loved ones, but we do not take it seriously in the sense of its being real. Two plus two is not four; it is five, because nothing in this world makes any sense, especially the fact that it seems to make sense.

The world is based on laws that come from the belief in nothingness, which says there is a separation thought that gives rise to a world of time and space governed by different kinds of laws: the laws of physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, human development, etc. All of them are derived from a belief that time and space are real, which is derived from the thought that the separation from God is real. All of this is really a belief in nothingness—and nothing will come from nothing. Everything in this world is a product of our thought, just as the quantum physicists say. What the quantum physicists don't usually say, though, is that the thought is guilt.

We are told that the world "is the delusional system of those made mad by guilt" (T-13.in.2:2). The world is a "delusional system"—meaning it is insane—"of those made mad by guilt." Guilt is what made this world and guilt is what sustains this world. Forgiveness is the only thing that will undo the guilt. Forgiveness says there is nothing out there to forgive—you did not do anything to me. What that translates to is that you may have hurt my body or the bodies of my loved ones, but you did not take the peace of God away from me because that is in my mind and only I have the power to take the peace of God away from me. But when I say you took it away from me because you beat me, abused me, humiliated me, abandoned me, insulted me, stole from me, or whatever, I am saying I do not have the power to take the peace away from me. I do not have a mind. You have the power. In fact, you have the power and are utilizing it. You took the peace of God away from me. That is the lie.

The two-plus-two-equals-four world would tell us that yes, this is what people did, and look at the effect it had. It had an effect on a body, but there is no body. The body is a projection of a thought that never happened. I keep coming back to that because that is the only way out of the questioner's mess. So if you all want to help, you have to tell him that what I am telling you is true. That is the only way out of the mess. There is no hope in this world. The world was made not to offer hope. Why? Because hope lies only in the decision-making mind. That is where the hope is because that is where the problem is. When we take ourselves from the mind and put ourselves in the dream as a dream figure, as a body in a world, we are making ourselves mindless, which means we are cutting off the only source of hope there is.

This course, to reiterate, is the only thing I know that offers true hope because it takes us back to the mind by teaching us why we made the world in the first place, why we continue to come into this world, why we continue to argue for this world, why we even think A Course in Miracles is about living in this world and that Jesus will tell us something. What in God's name would he tell us except that we are God's Name? That he would tell us. He does not talk to us. That is an auditory hallucination. It could be a helpful one if it leads people beyond the hallucination so that when they grow up they become like him—as in Helen's poem "A Jesus Prayer": people look at you and see Jesus instead of you (The Gifts of God, pp. 82-83). Then the voice is helpful because it leads beyond itself.

God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus do not speak in specifics. Love is non-specific. We translate it into something specific. That can be a right-minded symbol and be very helpful, but we need to use the symbol to get back to the source. Recall the lines in Lesson 161: "Hate is specific. There must be a thing to be attacked" (W-pI.161.7:1-2). An earlier line states, "Thus were specifics made" (W-pI.161.3:1). That refers to why the world was made. We made a world of specifics to keep us rooted in a thought system of specifics. There is a specific Son who attacked His specific Father—two specifics now.

That is why the Course says, "The world was made as an attack on God" (W-pII.3.2:1). It is a projection of the thought of attack—that we are better off outside the Love of God. Therefore we made a world the opposite of Heaven. We made a self the opposite of the Christ that we are. Heaven is abstract, meaning it is non-specific and non-dualistic, and so we make specific worlds, specific bodies, specific problems, specific needs, hearing specific voices telling us specific things—all of which make the world of specifics real. We will never get home that way. We use the specifics to lead us to the non-specific. That is different, but do not confuse symbol with source.

We are taught in the Course that the purpose of time is to teach us there is no time. The purpose of specifics is to teach us there are no specifics in Heaven. The purpose of being in the world is to learn there is no world. The right-minded purpose of being in a body is to learn that we are not bodies. The workbook says over and over again, "I am not a body. I am free. For I am still as God created me" (W-pI.201-220). God created us as spirit. And when we believe we are something other than that, it is because we believe we are a separated mind. We are always a separated mind, never a separated body. That is the illusion, the lie. "Nothing so blinding as perception of form." Perception sees the symbol. It sees the form and stops there. It does not go beyond the form. This course teaches us to use words, bodies, and relationships as a way of getting beyond them. Do not confuse symbol with source.

A symbol represents something or symbolizes something that cannot be expressed in any other way. Love cannot be expressed here. Love is perfect oneness. The Course says that forgiveness is the reflection of Heaven's love. It is the earthly equivalent of love, but it is not love. The reflection of the oneness of Heaven's love is the sameness of the Sonship, and in that recognition that we are all the same there is no judgment. How can one judge what is the same? One can judge only what is different. "Love makes no comparisons" (W-pI.195.4:2) because love is perfect oneness. The ego's love compares all the time, all the time. That is how you know that it is the ego.

Once again, what makes this course difficult is its uncompromising nature, but that is also where the hope of this course lies; that is where salvation is; and that is why this takes a lot of hard work. There are a number of passages that are very comforting. One of them tells us: "Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality" (T-16.VI.8:1). It does not happen like that. There is an even more powerful passage in Chapter 27: "So fearful is the dream, so seeming real, he could not waken to reality without the sweat of terror and a scream of mortal fear, unless a gentler dream preceded his awaking, and allowed his calmer mind to welcome, not to fear, the Voice that calls with love to waken him ..." (T-27.VII.13:4). We have to proceed in steps. We do not go from the self to the Self. The self becomes transformed. A few times in the Course Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit does not take our special relationships away from us, but transforms them (see for example, T-17.IV.2:3).

We are transformed from a guilty, angry, depressed self to a peaceful self. Our perception is transformed from seeing everyone as different, some good and some bad, to the perception that sees everyone as the same. It is still within the illusion, but it is the way out of the illusion. That is what the Course calls the happy dream (T-18.V). It has nothing to do with anything physical. The happy dreams are those gentle dreams that precede our awakening, leading us to the point from which we can awaken because we are no longer so afraid. We are gradually transformed from a wrong-minded self to a right-minded self. The wrong-minded self attacks, judges, and differentiates. The right-minded self forgives, looks beyond sin to error, and beyond error to the truth. It sees everyone as the same. The right-minded self does not judge, and should there be an act of judgment, the right-minded self does not judge that decision. In a right-minded state we are patient, gentle, and kind with our own egos, which allows us to be patient, gentle, and kind with everyone else's ego. Being more patient and kind with others' egos reinforces our patience and gentleness with ourselves.

This takes a lot of hard work and practice. We have to look at every ego thought we have and not justify any of them or feel guilty about them, or punish ourselves, no matter how large or small the thought may be. The Course says twice that a slight twinge of annoyance is a mask over the face of intense fury (W-pI.21.2; M-17.4).

We come to understand an ego thought as a defense. We feel guilty because we pushed love away. This left a vacuum in us, a lack we have to fill by taking from the outside, either by developing special love relationships that meet our needs, or by stealing others' innocence by attacking them, thereby giving them our sinfulness and getting their innocence because it is one or the other. All of this occurs simply because we became afraid of love, because in the presence of love we do not exist. We therefore push love away to protect ourselves. We preserve this self by taking our sin and guilt and projecting them onto other people. That is what we do all throughout the day.

We realize there is a purpose in getting angry, making judgments, and feeling sorry for ourselves. None of this just happens. The reason or the purpose is to escape from the terrible burden of guilt by not seeing it in ourselves but it in others. "Hate is specific" (W-pI.161.7:1). There must be someone out there we can hate, and since there is no one out there, we have to make a person up, or make something up. That is why we walk this world always being angry, always making judgments, always being anxious, always being fearful, always making comparisons—always seeking something outside that would fill up this hole we believe is inside.

The ego tells us that if we go inside, we will disappear into the Heart of God and there will be no more self. That is why, again, we need gentle steps. We do not go from the self to the Self; we transform the sense of self that we have. The process of doing that involves learning to see everyone as the same, and then forgiving ourselves when we do not see the sameness but instead see everyone as different.

Remember, this is not a course in doing; it is a course in undoing. We just keep looking, and if we keep looking, we will learn over time not to take the ego so seriously. We will learn not to give the ego power over us. We will realize that we have power over the ego and we will be much more tolerant of our mistakes. We will say, "I just became afraid. This is not a big deal. It does not mean I am failing the Course." There is only one ego, one ego thought system, so we are always doing the same thing over and over again. It is the attitude that we have toward the ego that is important.

**Part IV**

I always like to read this very comforting line from the text:

"The necessary condition for the holy instant does not require that you have no thoughts that are not pure. But it does require that you have none that you would keep" (T-15.IV.9:1-2).

This is not saying we should be free of ego thoughts. We are not going from the total ego self to a total non-ego self. That is the end of the journey, but it is a journey. What this also indicates is that this is a process of gentle, gradual transformation. This is not saying we should not have ego thoughts, thoughts that are not pure. Of course, we are going to have impure thoughts, thoughts of separation, attack, etc. But the condition does require that we have none that we would keep, meaning we would not hold them from the Holy Spirit or from ourselves. We would not try to justify them, rationalize them, spiritualize them, or deny them. We would simply recognize that we became afraid of love right at this moment, and that the only way we could preserve ourselves in the presence of love that we have judged to be fearful is to attack, to be depressed, to get sick, to get tired, to run to this addiction or that addiction, and so on. We need simply realize what we are doing. That's all.

Another line I quote all the time has to do with learning to be beyond suffering. It says that the way to get beyond suffering is to look at the problem as it is, not the way we have set it up (T-27.VII.2:2). We are not asked to let the problem go. We are not asked to become an ego-less person, just like that. If we want to end suffering, we need only look at the problem as it is, not the way we have set it up. The way we have set it up is that we took the problem from its source, which is our mind's decision for the ego, and projected it out onto a symbol, the body. That is how we have set the problem up, so it will never be resolved. It will never be resolved because it has been taken from its source.

To look at the problem as it is means to see that we became afraid of love, so we pushed it away. We pushed away the symbol of love: Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or any other symbol we may have chosen. We push love away and then feel guilty, because it is reminiscent of the "original sin" when we all pushed God's Love away. Rather than look at the problem as it is, we project the problem onto some thing or place where the problem is not. The problem is in our mind so we project it onto a body, where it does not exist. We project it onto a world of bodies where it does not exist.

All we are asked to do is to look at that and say, "Yes, this is what I have done, and I did it because I am afraid of love." But what else is new? We don't have to deny it, rationalize it, or justify it. We don't have to do anything. We just say, that is what we have done. We are all afraid of love, otherwise we would not be born into bodies. So what's the big deal? That is what we want to learn to say about the ego: "What's the big deal?"

There is another wonderful passage that compares all of our special relationships to "feathers dancing insanely in the wind" (T-18.I.7:6). Jesus tells us to "let them all go" because they are nothing (T-18.I.8:1). That is what they have in common. They are all like feathers. They are all nothing. They seem to be different—different shapes, colors, and textures—but they are all the same because they are all nothing. They are nothing, pretending to be the cause of our problems, but they are literally nothing. Yet as long as we think we are something, as we all do, then we have to use the other somethings of the world to learn that they have no power over us.

It is not helpful to be told only that we are illusions. I know I spent a good part of the day telling you that you are not here [laughter], but I am not as nice as Jesus is. What is important is to be told that what is illusory is that something out there can make us happy or unhappy. That we can learn. As long as we stumble into our bathroom every morning and see an image in the mirror with which we identify, in no way are we going to believe that we are not bodies. It is very important to know that intellectually, but on an experiential level it is not very helpful, and on a practical level it is meaningless. What is meaningful, however, is that we can learn "I am never upset for the reason I think" (W-pI.5). It is not someone else's fault that we do not experience the peace of God right at this moment, no matter what has been done to us. No matter what a microorganism may have done in the body to make it ill, that is not why we do not feel the peace of God. That we can learn.

Thus, the illusion within our illusory existence here is that the world has done this (whatever the "this" is) to us. The world has not done it to us. We have done it to ourselves. Near the end of Chapter 27 we learn that "the secret of salvation is but this: that you are doing this unto yourself" (T-27.VIII.10:1). We are not responsible for others' egos attacking us. That is their responsibility, but we are responsible for perceiving it as an attack that has robbed us of our peace. That is what we can learn and that takes a lot of work, but that is feasible. That is possible. That is the transformation. The world does not get transformed. How could nothing get transformed? Our perception is what gets transformed, and the transformation is a gentle process that leads us from having made the symbol all-important to now realizing the symbol is not so important. It is the source that is important because that is what gives us power, genuine power. It is that gentle and kind gradual shift that transforms the world in our perception.

People are not nice in this world. I always say nice people don't come here; they stay home with God. Guilty people come here; fearful people come here; angry, vicious people come here; merciless, cruel people come here; delusional people come here. Nice people don't come here, so what is the big deal that there would be people out there who attack us? We know that people in public office lie and deceive. That's news? That there are people who steal from us, lie to us in business, lie to us in relationships is not news. Now if there were a person who was truly honest and with integrity, that would be news! The latest scandal, lie, or deception gets boring after a while.

Again, we don't want to change the world: "… seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world" (T-21.in.1:7). The process is a gradual transformation of giving less importance to what is out there—as a source of pain and rejection or a source of happiness and pleasure—and giving more importance to what is inside, in our minds. We do it gradually because the fear of losing our individual self is so great. We made the world literally—literally made the world—as one collective Son to preserve the individuality of our separated mind. We did not make it to hide from God. That is what the ego told us, but the real reason we made it was to hide from our mind so that we would not change it. That is really important to understand. That is the meaning of the line that says, "You are not really afraid of crucifixion. Your real terror is of redemption" (T-13.III.1:10-11).

We are not afraid of crucifixion. We love crucifixion. That is what gave us our existence in the first place. Christianity built up its many religions on crucifixion, sacrifice, and suffering. Our real terror is of the redemption that is found in our decision-making mind that chose the ego but now can choose the Holy Spirit as its teacher. That is what we are afraid of. That is why we made up the world of bodies—so that we would be mindless. Then we made up all kinds of problems to consume our attention.

We have spent eons as societies trying to understand the problems that beset us and then eons trying to solve those problems. It literally is the case of the blind leading the blind because we confuse symbol with source. We don't even know there is a source. Problems cannot be solved externally because as soon as we solve a problem, the real problem of guilt in our mind generates another problem. That is what Lessons 79 and 80 say very clearly. We solve one problem and another rises to take its place because the problem is not in the world; it is not in the symbols. It is in what the symbols represent. We want there to be problems so that our attention is always directed to and entrapped by the world outside, the world of the mindless. Thus we never get back to the mindful because then we would change our minds. We therefore need a process that gradually changes how we look at the world and each other, and we do it gradually because our fear is so great.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

I thought I would close by reading another of Helen's poems, called "Transformation" (The Gifts of God, p. 64). It is a very lovely poem. I won't go into all of the circumstances of the writing, but it was written down at Eastertime, which is why there is an allusion to Easter at the end. Briefly, it happened when Helen and I and a priest friend of ours were visiting a group of nuns who lived on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. It was Palm Sunday and also Passover, so we did a combination Passover Seder and Palm Sunday. We finished the meal, and before going into the chapel to have Mass, we spontaneously sat quietly.

Something happened, and we all (five or six of us) at the same time just became very quiet. It was as if the world disappeared, and we just stayed that way for a while. I was always looking for an excuse to have Helen write down a poem, so on the way home I said to her that this would make a lovely poem, and in the next day or two she wrote down this poem. I am using it as the close of the workshop because it describes what I was talking about, especially at the end where the world is transformed: "The trivial enlarge in magnitude, while what seemed large resumes the littleness that is its due. The dim grow bright, and what was bright before flickers and fades and finally is gone." This is talking about the shift: The world does not disappear right away, but the way we look at it begins to change. What seemed large before was the world, the world of symbols, and what seemed trivial was the mind. In fact, the mind was so trivial we did not even know it existed. That begins to change, and what seemed to be so trivial and insignificant or nonexistent, the mind, slowly begins to assume a greater magnitude. We become aware that this is the source. This is why we are upset. This is why we are peaceful. What seemed to be so important and efficacious about everything we felt begins to shrink in importance because now we no longer confuse symbol and source. We now use the symbol as a way to get back to the source.

This poem obviously reflects that experience with the sisters, but it talks about this sudden shift, and it takes work to make it happen. That is the idea. We have to do the daily work of really looking at everything differently. And even though we may still feel angry, depressed, or excited by events or things, we do not justify the feelings, realizing that yes, this is what I am experiencing, but this is not the way it really is. We look at the problem as it is, which is the mind's decision to be an ego, and not the way we have set it up, which is shifting the problem from the mind to the world and giving the world causative power to make us happy or sad. We recognize that that power lies solely and always and only in our minds.

This poem, again, represents this shift. It ends with an Easter resurrection symbol because it was written down at Eastertime, but in the Course, resurrection has nothing to do with the biblical story. Resurrection is the awakening from the dream of death.

**Transformation**

It happens suddenly. There is a Voice
That speaks one Word, and everything is changed.

You understand an ancient parable
That seemed to be obscure. And yet it meant
Exactly what it said. The trivial
Enlarge in magnitude, while what seemed large
Resumes the littleness that is its due.
The dim grow bright, and what was bright before
Flickers and fades and finally is gone.
All things assume the role that was assigned
Before time was, in ancient harmony
That sings of Heaven in compelling tones
Which wipe away the doubting and the care
All other roles convey. For certainty
Must be of God.

                                               It happens suddenly,
And all things change. The rhythm of the world
Shifts into concert. What was harsh before
And seemed to speak of death now sings of life,
And joins the chorus to eternity.
Eyes that were blind begin to see, and ears
Long deaf to melody begin to hear.
Into the sudden stillness is reborn
The ancient singing of creation's song,
Long silenced but remembered. By the tomb
The angel stands in shining hopefulness
To give salvation's message: "Be you free,
And stay not here. Go on to Galilee."

(The Gifts of God, p. 64)

**Part V**

**Q:** Just as the world goes on wearily, so does practicing A Course in Miracles. I find that the more you go along and practice and the more you detach yourself from the world, the harder it is to maintain an interest in anything here. Getting up for work in the morning is the same old routine. Even with sporting activities, you do one for a few years, you get bored, and then you move on to something else. You get interested in one conspiracy theory, then you lose interest and find another. As you practice this course, how do you deal with the weariness?

**A:** The only way you could have this not be boring, dull, and wearisome is to be really clear about what you want. If you were clear that your goal is to awaken from this dream and go home, you would never experience your life as winding on wearily. You would see everything that happens as an opportunity to take you further along so you could one day be out of here, not out of the world through death, but out of the whole thought system. The problem is that you are ambivalent about the goal, which is what we all feel, because if we were not ambivalent about the goal, we would already have achieved it. We are still here schlepping along with this course because we are still ambivalent about the goal.

**Q:** Within the world, you go to university for three, four, or however many years. You put in your time, you do your work, you get your diploma, you hang it on the wall. So I guess I am still waiting for my Course diploma.

**A:** When you go to university, you have a goal, and that is to graduate. You do everything you have to do to graduate because that is your goal. If you are ambivalent about the goal, you will flunk classes, get incompletes, not hand in papers. You will not do everything you need to, because you do not want the goal. You are afraid of what is beyond graduation, so you just stay. There are a lot of people who do that because they are afraid of growing up. Once they get out of college, they are grown up and they have to fend for themselves in the world. But if they drag it on for 6, 8, 10, 12 years, it is easier because they are ambivalent about the goal.

It is the same thing here. We are all afraid of growing up, of graduating from this course and being back home with God. We are ambivalent about that goal because we cherish our individuality and specialness. Therefore we dawdle, and after a while dawdling winds on wearily. It is the same idea as the answer Jesus gave Helen when she complained that the Course was not working, that it was winding on wearily—enough already! Jesus asked her if she had ever considered that she had not done what it says. If your goal is to be out of the dream, then it will be impossible not to find your life here joyful, not because of anything intrinsic to the world, but because of the lessons you are learning. If you really wanted to graduate from college and learn at the same time, you would enjoy your courses. If there were a course that was not enjoyable, or was not going to help you achieve your goal, you would not take it. So if your goal is to leave this world as quickly as possible, this course will do it, but you have to be aware that the goal is ultimately to not be in a body, not by death, but by not being part of this thought system.

Over and over again, which is always infuriating, Jesus says this is a very simple course, and by that he means there is only one problem and one solution. What could be simpler? In response to Helen's complaining that this course was too difficult, he said:

**(T-31.I.1) How simple is salvation! All it says is what was never true is not true now, and never will be.**[The problem is that this means we are not true either.] **The impossible has not occurred, and can have no effects. And that is all. Can this be hard to learn by anyone who wants it to be true? Only unwillingness to learn it could make such an easy lesson difficult. How hard is it to see that what is false cannot be true, and what is true can not be false? You can no longer say that you perceive no differences in false and true.** [Remember, this is Chapter 31, three years of scribing, not to mention all the personal communication.] **You have been told exactly how to tell one from the other, and just what to do if you become confused. Why, then, do you persist in learning not such simple things?**

Now this is as gentle a reprimand as one can get, but it gets a little worse.

**(T-31.I.2:1-2) There is a reason. But confuse it not with difficulty in the simple things salvation asks you learn.**

One way of distinguishing what is false from what is true in this world is that anything that separates you from anyone else is false, and anything that allows you to say everyone is the same is true. The truth that we are all the same is a reflection of Heaven's truth of Oneness.

**(T-31.I.2:3-4) It** [salvation] **teaches but the very obvious. It merely goes from one apparent lesson to the next, in easy steps that lead you gently from one to another, with no strain at all.**

The strain that we all feel is our resistance. If your car is going 60 or 70 miles an hour, there is no strain on the engine. It just goes. But if you have the emergency brake on, the engine is going to feel a lot of strain. If you continue to drive with the emergency brake on, you are going to ruin your engine and your tires, but the problem is the brake, not the car. The engine is fine. Well, that is what we are all doing. This course would speed us home. What could be easier? What is true is true; what is false is false. That's it! The Course is incredibly consistent from beginning to end in making this point. The problem is that we are afraid, because "what is false is false" is our identity. "What is true is true" is our true Identity. We cling to this false identity, this specialness, this body, and that is the brake. That is why there is strain.

**(T-31.I.2:5-6) This cannot be confusing, yet you are confused. For somehow you believe that what is totally confused is easier to learn and understand.**

What is totally confused is the ego thought system that is trying to tell us what is true is false, and what is false is true. That is pretty confusing, and this is all because we cherish this self. If you read this course as a body, you will be confused because you will think it is all about the body or the world. You will be confused about what it is saying and will distort what it is saying; and therefore you will not achieve the benefits this course is promising. But if you recognize this is about the mind, then you will realize that any difficulty you are having is because you are still cherishing your body and your experiences here as a person. You cannot blame the Course, because it is telling you over and over again consistently that this is about the mind, not about the body or the world. We get confused by what it says and we find it difficult to do what it says because we are driving with the brake on.

**(T-31.I.2:7) What you have taught yourself is such a giant learning feat it is indeed incredible.**

This is really important. This is the height of Jesus' point to us here—why he is shaking a gentle finger and saying, "You are not being honest. Don't tell me you cannot learn this course. Look what you have learned."

What we have taught ourselves, again, is that what is false is true and what is true is false. We have taught ourselves this whole convoluted, complicated, intricate thought system of the ego. Not only that, we then made up a world and mastered it. We know how to live in this world. We know how to live with our bodies. We know how to make our bodies survive. It is very complicated. That is not the case in Heaven, as spirit does not doanything; it just is. In this world, we have to do a lot in order to survive physically just to keep the body going, and then psychologically just to keep the body going emotionally. Dealing with relationships is extraordinarily complicated, but we are all masters at it. We are all masters at guilt; we are all masters at being a victim.

**(T-31.I.3:1) No one who understands what you have learned, how carefully you learned it, and the pains to which you went to practice and repeat the lessons endlessly, in every form you could conceive of them, could ever doubt the power of your learning skill.**

There is no greater power in the world. The "learning skill" Jesus is talking about is really the power of the mind to choose. Jesus said no one could doubt the power of our learning skill. Remember what goes into living in this world. Just think about what goes into having made this world, dreaming it up.

**(T-31.I.3:2-6) There is no greater power in the world. The world was made by it, and even now depends on nothing else.** [The power of your mind to believe in it is the "nothing else."] **The lessons you have taught yourself have been so overlearned and fixed they rise like heavy curtains to obscure the simple and the obvious. Say not you cannot learn them. For your power to learn is strong enough to teach you that your will is not your own, your thoughts do not belong to you, and even you are someone else.**

Recall, there is no time. This is being written right now.

**(T-31.I.4) Who could maintain that lessons such as these are easy? Yet you have learned more than this. You have continued, taking every step, however difficult, without complaint, until a world was built that suited you. And every lesson that makes up the world arises from the first accomplishment of learning** [the original error that I could be separate from my Creator and Source and could make a self and a world the opposite of the Self in Heaven that God created]**; an enormity so great the Holy Spirit's Voice seems small and still before its magnitude. The world began with one strange lesson, powerful enough to render God forgotten, and His Son an alien to himself, in exile from the home where God Himself established him. You who have taught yourself the Son of God is guilty, say not that you cannot learn the simple things salvation teaches you!**

That is the answer to the complaint that this course does not work, that it is not practical and is too convoluted. We could not ask for anything that is so simple. As it says in the workbook, ". . . what is false is false, and what is true has never changed" (W-pII.10.1:1). The problem is that we do not want to learn it.

**Part VI**

**(T-31.I.2:7-8) What you have taught yourself is such a giant learning feat it is indeed incredible. But you accomplished it because you wanted to.…**

You wanted to, which means we do notwant to learn the lessons this course is teaching, because if we did, we would. Look what we learned instead. That is the key point. I do not think there is anyone who would argue with this and think that they would get away with it. This is an incredibly complicated world. Just think about how the body functions. It is very complicated and so brilliantly conceived that to confuse us even more, when it breaks down we need more complicated theories to fix it. It is unending. We made microorganisms like viruses that mutate, that are smarter than the vaccines injected to defeat them. It gets more and more incredible, confusing, and hopeless. We made the world that way, and we learned how to survive in it.

So Jesus has every right to say, "Don't tell me you cannot learn what I am teaching you." The reason we do not learn it is that we don't want to. That is why he says, "You accomplished it because you wanted to." One of the characteristics that make this course unique is that it focuses on motivation, which of course is an important psychological term. Any teacher knows that it is most frustrating to have to teach students who are not motivated. And any therapist knows that court-assigned or school-assigned patients make the worst patients, because they do not want to be there. The court has told them they have to go. Since they are not motivated, they will not learn and they will not change.

So Jesus' big challenge as our teacher in this course is to motivate us to learn, and the only way he can motivate us to learn is to convince us we need to learn, which means we need to know how miserable and unhappy we are because of what we have taught ourselves. There are two sentences that I put together that read: "Resign now as your own teacher, for you were badly taught" (T-12.V.8:3; T-28.I.7:1). We have to admit we have been badly taught and do not like the way we are living, but without blaming it on external circumstances.

All of us here could be blissfully happy by learning that we are not here. "How else can you find joy in a joyless place except by realizing that you are not there?" (T-6.II.6:1) Realizing we are not really here is the most joyous thing we could learn. That is where the hope is. If we are not here, where are we? We are in our mind, and we can do something about our mind. We can do something about what we are thinking. That gives us hope. That is what gives us back our power, not the power to dominate, oppress, and command, but the power to choose.

Again, Jesus is saying we should not doubt our learning skill. Look what we have taught ourselves. The laws of special relationships are incredibly complicated, and we spend a lifetime mastering them. Love is not complicated. You just love. You do not make distinctions. You love everyone, no matter what they do, no matter what they say, no matter who they are.

Specialness is not like that. With specialness, you have to scope out everything. Where are this person's weaknesses? Where are this person's strengths? What do I want to seize? How do I get it? How do I make it look as if I am not really getting it when I have really gotten it? How do I fool them? It is very complicated, but we are all so good at it; it is second nature now. We start learning this at birth. How do I get my parents' attention? I cry. It works. They hold me, and then they burp me and I am fine. Then if I want more attention, I get more gas. We are good at it, and we never stop burping. Just think how helpful it would be to go through life realizing that everything is just a burp, and all people want is to be held and patted on the back, and have someone say, there, there, it's all right. We know how to get that response from people.

We are not just talking about one body, one planet, or one solar system. We are talking about an entire cosmos. It is extraordinarily complicated. Scientists are looking for the simple explanation, the one thing that will explain everything. Well, they do not know where to look. Here is the one thing that explains everything: the decision maker choosing guilt. That is the explanation, and the real string theory is how all this strings together and makes up a world. The black hole is the black hole of guilt that swallows up everything. This is very simple, and the solution is simple. You just look at it and remember to laugh at the absurdity that a part of God's living and loving Oneness could wrench itself from that Oneness and declare itself to be its own self and its own creator. But this means giving up what we believe to be true.

That is why the lines near the beginning of Chapter 24 say, "To learn this course requires willingness to question every value that you hold. Not one can be kept hidden..." (T-24.in.2:1-2). Well, we all have a multitudinous list of values, but the core value is: I value me. I value the thought system that made me. I value the thought system of attack that protects and preserves me, because the unforgiving thought, the attacking thought "protects projection" (W-pII.1.2:3). As long as I can justify my hatred of you and my anger at you, my attack on myself stays hidden, protected, and never healed. That is what we cherish; that is what we value. That is why we value attack and that is why we value the body. The body proves that we exist.

That is why this is not a course in the body; this is a course in the mind. "This is a course in cause and not effect" (T-21.VII.7:8). The miracle returns the problem to the cause so it can be changed. Magic brings the problem, the cause, into the world of effect and confuses the two. It says the world, which is really the effect, has caused me. I am the victim; I am at the mercy of forces beyond my control. That is why Lesson 76 is so important: "I am under no laws but God's." We think we are under the laws of the body, the so-called natural laws. The only true laws we are under are the laws of God, which are the laws of Love and Oneness and eternal life. If you want to call it a law, the law of forgiveness is what bridges the gap and takes us from the laws of the world and the body back to God's laws. Thus, all Jesus is saying to us is, "Don't tell me you cannot learn my course."

This course is self-contained. Everyone always likes to have a gimmick. They have another way to practice forgiveness, another book, etc. It's all here. It does not need a sequel: A SonofA Course in Miracles[laughter]. It comes complete with a teacher—batteries included! You do not have to get anything else. Its teachings are so consistent and simple. That is why we do not do them, because we like complicated. "Complexity is of the ego" (T-15.IV.6:2). Again, what could be simpler than saying what is false is false and what is true is true? What is false cannot be true and what is true cannot be false.

While the Course speaks to us of the Oneness of Heaven, it teaches us how to live that principle of oneness in this world by learning that everyone is the same. "Make this year different by making it all the same" (T-15.XI.10:11). See everyone as the same because we all have the same mind. See every situation as the same because every situation is part of our classroom, if we choose to learn from it, or if we choose to learn the lessons of forgiveness. Again, it comes complete with a teacher and a curriculum. Weare the curriculum. The classroom is our life, and the curriculum is all of our relationships. Why seek elsewhere? We seek elsewhere because this is too frightening, and it is frightening because it is the truth. Something in all of us knows it is the truth, and that is why we have embraced this and devoted all this time to it, but it is really important to also recognize how fearful we are. We get back then to that idea of resistance. We have to look at the resistance as to why it is we are not learning what is so simple.

**Part VII
"Entering God's Presence"**

"You cannot enter God's Presence if you attack His Son" is a line from the section "The Inheritance of God's Son" in Chapter 11 of the text. It is another of those sentences that contain within them the whole theory of the Course. It helps us understand why it is that we get angry, criticize, judge, and find fault. Also in that section, and actually in the previous section as well as many other places in the Course, we are taught that attacking others is no different from attacking one's self. Self-blame is the same as blame because, since there is no world out there and projection makes perception, whatever we feel about ourselves we will then express outwardly. Whatever we express outwardly is a direct result of what we are feeling inside.

Thus, the idea that we cannot enter God's Presence if we attack His Son works for self-attack as well as attack of others. Our terror of entering into God's Presence is why we made the world in the first place, and one of the principal ways of defending against that fear and protecting ourselves from entering into God's Presence is to attack. That is why we are told in the Course that "the world was made as an attack on God" (W-pII.3.2:1). It was! Everything here is an attack on God: being born is an attack on God, taking a breath is an attack on God, because all this makes the body real, and if we are bodies, we are not minds. If we are not minds, there is no way we can gain access to the thought that leads us to the Mind, the Mind of God or the Mind of Christ. So we attack because we do not want to enter into God's Presence.

The fourth obstacle to peace, "The Fear of God," is a wonderful section for many reasons. "The Obstacles to Peace" sections in Chapter 19 of the text take us on a journey, and when we reach the fourth obstacle, the idea is that we are about ready to penetrate the final veil—to undo the final obstacle and be in God's Presence, which is really to be in the Presence of our true Self. That final section does not talk about God. It is not about unity with the Godhead or about "a Oneness joined as One"; it is not about any fancy, high-falutin' non-dualistic ideas. What it talks about is forgiveness of your brother. That is what makes the Course so different from any other spirituality. At the same time that it contains all these lofty, wonderful ideas about our oneness with God, the illusory nature of the physical universe, and the only reality being God and God's Oneness, it encourages us and gives us very specific guidelines on how to live in this illusory world. The principle that should govern our everyday living here is forgiveness. That is the way we achieve our ultimate goal of returning to what one passage refers to as "a Oneness joined as One" (T-25.I.7:1). The way we enter God's Presence is through the complete forgiveness of one other person, whoever that special love or hate object is.

Rather than talk about what God's Presence is like, the Course tells us how to attain God's Presence, how to return to where we never left. The theme of this class, You cannot enter God's Presence if you attack His Son, sums it all up. That is how we do it. It also gives us a way of understanding why we are continually attacking ourselves and each other. No matter how many years we may have been studying this material and being devout, sincere, and serious about it, it does not stop us from judging, finding fault, criticizing, getting angry; and it certainly does not stop us from having all the feelings of self-hatred that are self-attack or guilt. This explains why.

I always like to quote the famous line from Hamlet, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in it." There is a method in our madness. There is a reason, a purpose behind everything that we do here, especially for all of our attack thoughts. It is a major theme of the workbook, a major theme of everything in this course. There is that one important lesson, "Holding grievances is an attack on God's plan for salvation" (W-pI.72). Well, God's plan for salvation is forgiveness. If we are holding grievances, obviously we are not forgiving. We hold grievances for a reason: We don't want to accept God's plan for salvation, which is forgiveness. The ultimate consummation of that plan is the acceptance of the Atonement. We make up problems for a reason. There is a reason, not only for getting angry, but for making ourselves anxious, fearful, and depressed. There is a reason for making up problems when there are no problems, for making up a world and believing there is a world when there is no world. There is a reason behind it all.

The section "What Is the Peace of God?" in the teachers' manual tells us very clearly that when we get angry, it is like having a curtain fall and then the peace of God is gone (M-20.3-4). That is a purposive statement. We get angry becausewe do not want the peace of God—we want there to be a curtain, something between us and God's peace, something between us and our entering into God's Presence. That is why we get angry; that is why we indulge all of our specialness thoughts and all of our specialness practices. That is why anything we do that makes the phenomenal universe, the physical world real is purposive. Again, that is what makes this Course unique.

Many other spiritualities, especially in the East, talk about the world being an illusion. Yet none of them talks about the purposive nature of the world, why we made the world, why we choose to be born into this world, why we continually choose to have all these thoughts, however illusory they may be. There is a reason for all of that: We are terrified of disappearing into the Presence beyond the veil. There is that wonderful line that comes near the end of the fourth obstacle to peace where Jesus says to us, "Together we will disappear into the Presence beyond the veil, not to be lost but found; not to be seen but known" (T-19.IV-D.19:1)—no longer to be in the world of perception, the world of subject and object, the world of duality, the world of bodies, but to be known, which in the Course is a synonym for Heaven or Oneness.

The key word in that statement is "together." "Together we will disappear into the Presence beyond the veil…" Together, Jesus says, you and I, and with us, all of our brothers. The same section also says that we lift this veil together, or not at all (T-19.IV-D.12:8; my italics). The person we do it with together is anyone whom we are excluding, any object of our specialness, special love or special hate. We lift the veil together, or not at all, which is the Holy Spirit's correction for the ego principle of one or the other. One or the other is what established the ego as a seeming reality, as a separated entity. It was either God's Love and perfect Oneness, or our separation and special love, because there cannot be both. When we chose to believe in the lies of the ego, when we chose to believe that the "tiny, mad idea" of being separate from God was real, and we took it seriously, at that moment the ego was born. That is the moment when the principle of one or the other came into ascendancy. Either I exist or God is.

Early in the text, Jesus contrasts existence and being. Being is a state of reality; existence is our seeming life in this world. We can say the ego exists; spirit is. There is a line in the workbook that says, "We say 'God is,' and then we cease to speak" (W-pI.169.5:4). What else can you say? God is, meaning God is perfect Being. That is the state of perfect Oneness. "We say 'God is,' and then we cease to speak, for in that knowledge words are meaningless." There are no lips to say the words, and no ears to hear, because all there is in reality is "a Oneness joined as One," an undifferentiated unity, which is how many of the mystics refer to that experience. There is no beginning and no end. There is a beautiful passage in the workbook that describes how the lights of Heaven light, and there is no place where one ends and another begins (W-pI.129.7:5). They all become one light, one love, one Self.

**Part VIII
"Entering God's Presence" (cont.)**

Again, it is one or the other. Either I exist as a separated object, a separated thing, beginning as a separated thought in the mind and then later becoming a separated body, or there is God. One or the other. Since we believe we exist, that means there is no God, which of course is what the ego wants. If there is no God, how can we enter into His Presence? That of course is what we all want. We don't want to enter into God's Presence because in that Presence there is no individuality, no uniqueness, and no specialness. There is only "a Oneness joined as One." Being afraid of that, we are always choosing to be separated, and since the body is the embodiment of the thought of separation, we are always choosing to make our bodies real.

One of the best ways of making the body real is to attack others, to see ourselves as separate from other bodies. You have hurt me, you have abused me, you have ridiculed me, you have betrayed me, you have abandoned me, you have been unkind to me. There is a "you" that has been a victimizer, and there is an "I" that is the victim. Therefore there is separation, and therefore it is one or the other.

Seeing everything as the same is the correction for the ego's belief that we are all different. The principle of one or the other is saying we are different, beginning with the perception that God is different from His Son, the Son is different from His Father. That is carried through everything in this world where our bodies tell us we are different from other bodies. No two bodies are alike. Even identical twins end up not being perfectly alike. They will have different personalities, different likes and dislikes, and they will develop different symptoms. No one and nothing here is the same; we are all different. One or the other.

But on the level of the mind, which is where our true reality is, we are all the same, and it is on that level that we recognize the truth of the principle of together, or not at all. I cannot enter into God's Presence unless I do it with you. Not that I have to do it with you physically. You might have died 30 years ago, and I could still be holding a grievance against you. That is enough to keep me out of Heaven, which is what I want. That is the key idea that underlies everything in this course. We do not want to enter into Heaven, because if we did, we would be there. We would be there because we are alreadythere. In other words, we would awaken from the dream that tells us we are not in Heaven. "You are at home in God, dreaming of exile . . ." (T-10.I.2:1). Everything here is a dream. We are at home in God. That is our reality. We never left. We are still God's one Son, perfectly at one with Him, undifferentiated from Him, but we are dreaming we are in an exile of separation, protected by the defense of specialness.

Thus, I am a special person with special needs, and you are a special person with special abilities that can meet my special needs. My special needs and your special abilities will meet, and that is the "marriage made in Heaven," which of course is really hell, but we think it is Heaven. It is Heaven, because it is our version of Heaven. Our version of Heaven is existence, and it doesn't matter whether it is a happy existence or a miserable existence. It doesn't matter whether we are happy or sad, alive or dead. If I am dead, then I existed at one point, and depending on what my belief system is, I may continue to exist after my body dies. As long as we exist, everything is okay. That is the Kingdom of Heaven to the ego.

Attack is a wonderful way of reinforcing our existence. Your existence threatens mine; therefore, I am entitled to defend myself. Likewise, you believe my existence threatens yours, and so you believe you are entitled to defend yourself. That is what most relationships are all about. In fact, that is what all relationships are about until we recognize what they are truly about, and then change our minds and ask for help. They are all about trying to reaffirm our existence.

There is an important section near the end of Chapter 28 called "The Secret Vows" that talks about the vows we make with each other (T-28.VI). The context of the discussion is sickness, but the principle works for everything else. We all make a vow—in fact there is one paragraph that talks about an oath—that we continually make to each other to uphold our existence. It doesn't matter who is on top, who wins, who loses, or who gains. It doesn't make any difference, as long as we help each other affirm the reality of our existence here as bodies, as separated creatures. It doesn't matter whether you think you are in a loving relationship or in a hateful relationship because they are the same. And they are the same because ultimately they serve the same purpose, and not only that, underneath the seeming love there lies hate anyway. They reflect a secret vow, a sacred oath, a promise to reinforce each other's existence that we will never ever break. The ego doesn't care if we love each other for 50 years or hate each other for 50 years, as long as there is an "each other."

That is another way of understanding why, when we wrote our scripts as individuals and dreamed our dream, we began our physical life with parents. They are the "other." First, there are two of them. There have to be two if there is going to be a third. At some point the baby is born. Now there is an "other" relating to the two others, or parental substitutes. It doesn't make any difference. There is always an "other." The infant cannot survive without the aid of someone else. If there is no one else, the infant will die, because it will not be able to get food or protect itself. Thus, built into the system is the fact that there is an "other." That is what we think of as our physical birth, but that is just a re-enactment of the birth of the ego.

The ego is born out of its opposition to God. That is why the Course discusses the authority problem. Everyone here has an authority problem. Who is the author of my existence? God and the ego, from the ego's point of view, are fighting for authorship of our existence. And, of course, the god who is fighting is just a projection of the ego, because the true God does not even know we left because we did not leave. There always has to be someone in opposition.

The ego was born in its belief that it was opposed to God and God was opposing us. One or the other. There is a line from the teachers' manual that says, "Think not He has forgotten" (M-17.7:4). God has never forgotten our sin; therefore, He, "an angry father, pursues his guilty son. Kill or be killed . . ." (M-17.7:10-11). One or the other. That is the ontological foundation for everything that has ever happened. The entire physical universe spanning billions and billions of years—not just our solar system or galaxy—stems from the projection of that one thought of one or the other. We (the one Son) opposed God by leaving Him and telling Him, in effect, that His Love was not enough, and that we wanted something more than the Everything. We then projected that out and believed God now was leaving us, and was angry at us. That is the eternal battle from which we seek to escape; but we will never escape. We cannot escape because of that memory that is always there: "Think not He has forgotten." God will never forget what we did.

That is what continually impels us to make the world real. The question people sometimes ask is, why do people keep coming back here? Don't they know? Don't they remember how awful it was? Who wants to go through adolescence again? Who wants to struggle with all these awful relationships? Who wants to go through the pain of getting old and then dying? Who wants to do that? Why do we keep doing it? Well, it is not that we forget. We damn well remember. We want the suffering, the pain, the Sturm und Drang of our lives. We want the conflict, because that is what proves we exist. That is what people don't understand. We remember our purpose. We like being individuals, which is why Jesus continually calls us insane. We forget the pain—not the physical and psychological pain: thatwe remember and we love. We love the fact that we are here. What we forget is the pain of being separated, how costly it is to us. That fleeting moment of the pleasure of telling God to get lost, believing we got away with it, and then making up a whole world to support the fact that we got away with it, sustains us—and we forget the agony. There are no words in any language to truly embrace the searing agony and pain of being separated. All we know is that we cherish our existence, and would gladly die—and we do die over and over again—to sustain that existence.

What we need to do with this course is let ourselves be lifted up above the battleground and look with Jesus back down on what this world is really like. That is why there are so many passages in this course that talk about what the world is like. Practically nothing in this course talks about what Heaven is like, but so much of it talks about what the world is like and what life in the body is like. The beginning of Chapter 13 is one of those incisive passages that depict this. The passage begins with the line, "The world you see is the delusional system of those made mad by guilt" (T-13.in.2:2). It is the guilt over the belief that we destroyed Heaven. One or the other: If I exist, Heaven must be destroyed. Then Jesus describes what the world is like and what it is like to be in a body. He ends the passage by saying, "If this were the real world, God would be cruel" (T-13.in.3:1). If this is what reality really is, God would be cruel, because who would create a world in which there is such pain and suffering? Well, the answer is clearly, not God. We did it, and there is a method in our madness, a reason for our doing it, and the reason is that it proves we pulled off the impossible. It clearly demonstrates that we will never get back home. We believe it because we do not want to get back. We do not want to enter into God's Presence.

There is another important line that says, "The memory of God comes to the quiet mind" (T-23.I.1:1). Well, we do not want the memory of God. If we allow that memory to dawn on our awareness, we will disappear into it, because we could not withstand the Love of that thought if we let ourselves experience it. So we don't let ourselves experience it. If "the memory of God comes to the quiet mind," all we have to do is keep our minds busy. Well, sin, guilt, and fear keep our minds very busy. Then our minds project all this out, we make up a world, and then are continually busy reinforcing the fact there is a world here. It seems as if our bodies are busy. They are always doing something. Even when we think we are sleeping, our hearts are pumping, our lungs are breathing, our digestive system is working. When we are awake, we all know how busy we usually are, not only with what our bodies do, but in terms of how we think. We are always very busy, and it is all purposive because "the memory of God comes to the quiet mind."

If we are afraid of that quiet because of what it will lead us to, we just have to keep our mind and our self in a perpetual state of disquiet, and we are all very good at making up one problem after another. We are expert at it, masters at it. Just the way we made the body so imperfect is proof of that. We always have to eat, to breathe, and to eliminate. We always have to do something, and as we get older, things become more and more problematic. Then enter the whole idea of relationships on a psychological level, and it becomes almost impossible. It is all purposive. We do not want to enter into God's Presence, and so we continually attack His Son, His Son being ourselves and everyone in our lives. Again, it doesn't matter whether we are attacking ourselves or someone else.

**Part IX
"Entering God's Presence" (cont.)**

This next passage talks about this process:

**(T-11.IV.4:5-6) The beginning phases of this reversal are often quite painful** [the shift from the wrong to the right mind**], for as blame is withdrawn from without, there is a strong tendency to harbor it within. It is difficult at first to realize that this is exactly the same thing, for there is no distinction between within and without.**

This is another line that contains everything in this course, the metaphysics as well as the practical application. There is no difference between within and without. If there is no difference between within and without, the very words are irrelevant and meaningless. The word within has meaning only when there is a without. An inside is the opposite of an outside. Otherwise, what does inner mean? And if there is no inner, then what does outside mean? We have to remember this is a non-dualistic system; there is no within and without.

The central Course principle that explains or describes that is ideas leave not their source. The thought of separation, the idea of separation, has never left its source in the mind, which means projection does not work. The fundamental lie of the ego is that we can get rid of what we do not want by putting it outside ourselves. God has not forgotten, and God will get us in the mind, so we get rid of the inner world we do not like by projecting it out and making an outer world. But if ideas leave not their source, there is no outer world. There is no without; therefore, there is no within. There is only the mind.

One of Helen's lovely poems called "Awake in Stillness" begins with the line, "Peace cover you, within without the same." We cannot have outer peace if there is not inner peace, and if there is inner peace, there must be outer peace, which is why there will never be peace in this world, because people are always seeking to forge a peace that is external. Since the world runs on the ego principle of one or the other, in any kind of peace treaty or peace agreement there will always be a winner and a loser. The loser, of course, just waits until he gets the strength, and then he will become the winner and someone else the loser. That is why every successful revolution contains the seeds for the next revolution, and nothing ever changes. People are afraid of inner peace.

Remember, "The memory of God comes to the quiet mind" (T-23.I.1:1). So the way to not have a quiet mind is to not have a quiet world, which is why our world is anything but quiet. It is always in a state of war, whether we are at war with other governments, other races, other religions, or other species like microorganisms. We are always at war. We have all of the personal wars we are always fighting within our families, with our friends and business colleagues, etc.

Again, everything is purposive. We first blame ourselves, we attack ourselves, and then we magically think we can get rid of the guilt by projecting it onto someone else.

**(T-11.IV.5:1-2) If your brothers are part of you and you blame them for your deprivation, you are blaming yourself. And you cannot blame yourself without blaming them.**

"You cannot blame yourself without blaming them" because projection makes perception. Whatever we make real for ourselves in our minds, we will project, and because we project it, we will perceive it out there. We perceive our own "secret sins and hidden hates" and our guilt. We make it all real and then say it is intolerable and we must get rid of it. We project it and now think someone else is the bad one, the sinner. As a thought in the mind, I say I am not the one who separated from God, someone else did it. Then voilàI am born, and now I realize it was my parents who separated me from God. I did not want to leave my kingdom of heaven in my mother's womb. Someone, something pushed me out, and then they made a big deal about it. No one paid attention to the fact that I was crying, that I did not want to go.

We can see how physical life begins that way. We came into existence, not because of a decision our mind made, but because of a sperm and an egg. All the biological brilliance of scientists going back decades explains sperm, eggs, zygotes, and then we are off and running. Clearly, that is why we are here; that is why we were born. But if ideas leave not their source, nothing is happening biologically, because there is no biological. There is only psychological. There is nothing of the body to study and understand. There is only a mind and how it functions. There are no biological, physiological, neurological problems. There is only a psychological problem: the mind's having chosen the wrong teacher. There is only one solution: the mind's choosing the right teacher. That's it! Very simple. Then finally:

**(T-11.IV.5:3) That is why blame must be undone, not seen elsewhere**.

These simple declarative sentences say everything. Where we see the blame is in the world of bodies. People read this course and unfortunately get it all wrong. They think it is about the healing of relationships. Well, the Course says that, but it doesn't mean that. Jesus does not always speak the truth [laughter], not in form anyway. We should understand his content. He always speaks the truth, but not on the level of form. He just tells us, "blame must be undone, not seen elsewhere," not seen in some other body. The problem is not in my relationship with you. My relationship with you doesn't have to be healed. I don't have a relationship with you. There is no "without." The relationship that has to be healed is my mind's relationship with my ego. That's the problem.

The Course is written the way it is because we think we are bodies, and so bodies are in relationship to other bodies. Since that is where our minds' attention is focused, that is where the Course begins, only so that we can learn that projection makes perception. My rotten relationship with you is a projection of my rotten relationship with me. I chose the wrong thought in my mind to identify with, i.e., the ego. Now this does not mean that it is not helpful to talk things out with another person, but in the end, if you are really doing it right, you will realize there is nothing to talk about with the other person. The other person is not my problem. No matter what you have done or have not done, you are not my problem. I am my problem, but the "I" is not the figure that has a name and is encased in a body. The person who is the problem is my mind that has chosen the wrong teacher. That is where blame is undone.

The problem is not guilt. Guilt says I sinned; sin says I separated. Well, I did not separate, therefore there is no sin and no guilt. How could guilt be a problem? The problem is not in the guilt. The problem is in my mind's decision to believe in guilt.There is a big, big difference. Thus, I don't fight against my guilt. I don't fight against the guilt I projected onto you. I use the guilt I projected onto you to get back to the guilt that I decided for in my mind, so that I can choose differently. This distinction is absolutely crucial. "That is why blame must be undone, not seen elsewhere."

Skipping a sentence:

**(T-11.IV.5:5) Self-blame is therefore ego identification, and as much an ego defense as blaming others.**

"Self-blame," which is guilt, "is therefore ego identification," which means that is the problem. The mind's identification with the ego is the problem. Very clear. Here it is in black and white. Why do we choose guilt when it is so painful? The reason is that guilt says we separated, and if we separated, we are no longer in God's Presence. It also says that what we have done is so unconscionable that even if we believed we undid our guilt, God would still not take us back. This reveals to us the prominence of guilt as a defense. It's a defense, just as anger, sickness, depression, and everything else here is a defense. Guilt says we can never be in God's Presence because we separated from Him, and not only that, we do not deserve to be in His Presence.

I always like to remind people that if you think I or the Course made this all up, just read the story of Adam and Eve in the third chapter of Genesis. That is the Western myth. Chapter 3 is absolutely brilliant. The writers were masters. It is brilliant in depicting the rise of the ego thought system with the exact same concepts we find in this course, culminating in the ultimate punishment. As if it is not bad enough that Adam and Eve would be punished for their sin through suffering and dying, they were also kicked out of the garden, banished from the kingdom, with God putting angels with flaming spears to keep them from getting back in. That is the ultimate banishment.

Why is that the Western myth? Why is the entire Bible from Chapter 3 in Genesis on derived from that myth? According to the Christian stories, Jesus would not have been sent into this world were it not for sin. Everything in the Bible is rooted in that third chapter. That is why I plead with students of the Course not to think for even one minute that the Course is an extension of the Bible, a "third testament." It has absolutely nothing to do with the Bible except in its language, but not in its teachings. In the Bible, sin is made so real that God Himself responds to it in a heavy-handed way, which obviously makes it real. It seems as if He has a soft spot in His heart. He feels a little sorry for some of His people, but not for all of the people. Then He sends Jesus to redeem the world from Adam's sin. St. Paul, the architect of Christian theology, talks about Adam's sin.

That is the thought system that underlies all people in this world, whether they believe in God or not. It is the idea that we have done something totally unconscionable. Guilt is what roots us in that, which is why guilt is the ego defense from which everything else emerges. But it is a defense, which means we choose it to protect ourselves from what we fear. What we fear as individual egos, individual entities, special, unique selves is remembering that this is all a dream and we made it all up, because at that point we would clearly disappear into the Presence beyond the veil and the world would be gone—not just the world as we know it, but the entire world would be gone. The world is "the delusional system of those made mad by guilt" (T-13.I.2:2). Take away the guilt and there is no world. If there is no world, the "I" that I think I am, ensconced in this body, would cease to exist. Therefore, I protect the world and myself by all kinds of defenses, which are all derived ultimately from guilt. Guilt, though, is a decision, just as attack, sickness, and depression are decisions.

It is essential for us, then, to realize the purpose guilt serves. It is an ego defense. That is what self-blame is. Attack is an ego defense. Later in the text there is the very important section called "The Two Pictures," where Jesus says that "all defenses do what they would defend" (T-17.IV.7:1). The purpose of a defense is to protect us from what we are afraid of. The very fact that we have a defense is saying there is something we are afraid of. Consequently, every time we choose a defense and then identify with it, we are choosing to identify with its purpose, which is to escape from fear, which tells us there is something we should be afraid of.

**Part X
"Entering God's Presence" (Conclusion)**

Just to compound the whole thing—which is why the ego is so brilliant (the mother of all evil geniuses we might say)—once we choose guilt as a defense, we have to defend against the guilt. The ego just layers defense upon defense upon defense. We choose guilt as a defense that says sin is real, and then we have to protect ourselves from the horrors of guilt; namely, that God will punish us, because it is one or the other. Either I destroy God or He destroys me. We then project our guilt onto a world that we make and onto all the people we put there. We then get angry at people, magically hoping that God will see what is going on, recognize the principle of one or the other as sacrosanct, and say, "Yes, it is one or the other and here are the guilty ones." We now become the innocent ones.

If you have the guilt, I do not. I am guilt-less. Well, guiltlessness is the synonym for innocence. I am innocent; that person is sinful. That person will be killed. But the problem is that when I attack you by projecting my guilt onto you, there is a part of me that knows I am making this up and that you are not responsible for my being sick or upset, or for my perpetual state of disquiet. You have not done anything. Therefore I will believe that because I am attacking you, you are justified in attacking me back, and so I will be afraid. That is the attack-defense cycle that Lesson 153 talks about: "Attack, defense; defense, attack . . . ." I attack you as a way to get rid of my guilt. My self-blame now becomes blame, but now you are going to attack me back, and I am afraid, which means the guilt that originated in my mind trying to protect itself from its fear of love now engenders fear. So I have fear and I have guilt as a defense against fear, which leads me to fear. Brilliant!—because we do not know what happened. All we know is that we are afraid of attack from every quarter. Any time we have an attack thought—which means any time we have guilt because guilt will inevitably and always lead to attack thoughts—we will feel guilty for the attack thought, and guilt demands punishment. I will believe the person I am attacking will attack me back.

Why do you think we get sick? We get sick because every time we take a breath, every time we take a step, we are killing hundreds of thousands of microorganisms, which will now get even, so we get flu, viruses, colds, and all kinds of strange and exotic diseases. Why do we choose to get sick? Because sickness is a way of mitigating God's punishment. We believe we deserve to be punished by God because of what we have done. And the ultimate punishment, of course, is death and being cast out of the Kingdom forever, which means hell. So we make a deal with God. Special relationships are always about deals and bargains. We say "Look, I know I did something terrible. I know You are very busy; there is a lot going on in Your world, so I will punish myself so You don't have to bother. I will get sick." And we actually think God falls for that.

What are the agents of our getting sick? All of these microorganisms that we willfully—with the height of selfishness and self-centeredness—destroy every time we take a breath, every time we eat something, and every time we take a step. Every time we get in a car and drive, God knows the havoc we are wreaking. We are killing everyone, but we don't think they are people, because they are very tiny and we cannot see them. But we know that they know and they have family, and the word spreads. "Get this guy. He just trampled hundreds of thousands of our kinsmen. Get him!" Then I get sick.

A prominent theory is that cancer is caused by a virus. Well, those are all the people we killed, except we don't call them people because we make distinctions among what we laughably call living things. Some we call people, and others we call germs, bad guys, and we don't think about that. When Buddha said we should have compassion for all living things, he meant it. That is why Buddhism, when it is truly practiced the way it originated, is a very kind and gentle discipline and spirituality. It teaches compassion for all living things. But we forge a belief in differences. We don't see everyone and everything as the same.

I am not saying we should stop breathing, or use special filters, or walk with a broom as some Buddhists do so as not to step on a living thing. We should just understand the insanity of the system, and how it is all about guilt and punishment. That is why we continually choose to come into this world. It is our guilt that drives us into this world; it is guilt that sustains us in this world; and it is guilt that reinforces the very guilt that led to our coming into this world. It is a very vicious circle. We are trapped in this vise of guilt. Guilt leads us to attack; attack leads us to fear a counterattack, which means we have to defend ourselves, which just makes us guiltier.

We thus have these two cycles that feed on each other: the guilt-attack cycle and the attack-defense cycle, and they end where they began, with guilt. We just go around and around: guilt, attack, attack, defense, and there is no way out of it. This is a wonderful passage from Lesson 153:

"It is as if a circle held it fast [meaning the mind], wherein another circle bound it and another one in that, until escape no longer can be hoped for nor obtained. Attack, defense; defense, attack, become the circles of the hours and the days that bind the mind in heavy bands of steel with iron overlaid, returning but to start again. There seems to be no break nor ending in the ever-tightening grip of the imprisonment upon the mind" (W-pI.153.3).

A very clear portrait of what life in this world is like! And people think this is a nice world. How can it be a nice world when this is going on all the time? Governments, religions, races live like this because individuals live like this. This is the ego thought system; this is what made the world. Why is the mind imprisoned? Because the mind chooses to be imprisoned.

There are two parallel sections in the text: "The Confusion of Pain and Joy" and "The Difference between Imprisonment and Freedom" (T-7.X; T-8.II). We get them backward. We think the above passage from Lesson 153 is about freedom: I am free from my guilt. Well, it really is imprisonment. Sometimes we think our life works wonderfully because we have mastered the attack part of this, but we forget about the guilt. The decision-making mind chooses to imprison itself because it is afraid of what would happen if the mind were free. If the mind were to be free, it would freely recognize its mistaken choice and freely choose again. When it chooses the Holy Spirit's Atonement, when it chooses Jesus as its teacher, and forgiveness instead of a grievance, our individual self will be gone, because this self is sustained by guilt and preserved by attack.

We choose to imprison our mind by guilt and then attack so that we never have to get back to that decision-making part and choose again. We all fled the mind as one Son collectively. We made the entire cosmos, the entire universe, and fragmented ourselves into little pieces of ego, stuck them in a body, forgot that we did so, and all we are left with is life here in the body, governed by principles we are not aware of: one or the other, kill or be killed. Someone is in back of us pulling the strings of our puppets, and we do not even know it. We think we are alive. That is the farcical nature of all this.

When you step back, you realize it is a farce. Something else is pulling the strings that make us do, say, think, and feel everything that we do, say, think, and feel. We have no idea that we are simply robots programmed by a guilt-driven mind that says, "God has never forgotten, so identify yourself with a body and you will be safe." We don't remember that. Otherwise, as one passage describes in a humorous way, we would say to the ego: You sold me a bill of goods. You told me I would be safe in a body. Yet, I am in a body and I am attacked all the time (T-4.V.4). But we forgot we were told that, so all we are left with is being in a body, listening to the same voice that says "attack, attack, attack," and we forget the mind's decision for guilt that keeps driving us to attack, attack, attack, and then defend, defend, defend. That is all we hear, and that is how we live.

We think the principle of one or the other has to do with my body versus your body, my religion versus your religion, my country versus your country, my sports team versus your sports team, my sex versus your sex. It doesn't matter. We are always fighting a battle, and we forget that the principle of one or the other has nothing to do with bodies. It has to do with an insane thought system that is in the mind, but is protected in the mind by its decision to forget we have a mind, and then to identify with a body that we believe is external to the mind. In fact, we don't even know we have a mind. We just think the body is here.

But if ideas leave not their source, then the bodies of the world and the world itself are simply projections of a thought system that has never left its source in the mind. That is why the problem has to be seen where it is, not elsewhere. My problem is not my special relationship with you or with my parents. It is not with my aging body, or with the people I am living with or working with. The problem is not with the government that I am a citizen of. The problem is my mind's decision for the ego, pure and simple. It is so simple that we cannot believe that that is what it is, which is why the ego made a very complicated thought system that culminates in a very complicated world in which there are no solutions. We will never solve the problems of the world or the body, because the body and the world are not the problem. The problem is that we are terrified of our mind's choosing to enter into the Presence of God. So we cherish our guilt, we cherish the seriousness of sin, we cherish our fear of God's punishment, and we cherish the defense that seemingly protects us from all that, which is living in this world as a body. And so we forget that the whole purpose of this course is to have Jesus encourage us to get back to the mind so we can choose differently: freedom instead of imprisonment. That is our only hope.

**Part XI
Guilt vs. Remorse**

I have recently started to make a distinction between guilt and remorse. The problem with guilt is that once you are guilty, you are inevitably going to continue to do whatever it is that made you guilty. Guilt says I have done something terrible in the past, I am a terrible person in the present, and I deserve to be treated like a terrible person in the future. Guilt therefore retains the "sin." Remember, guilt does not exist, so the most devastating thing about guilt is not the guilt itself, but what happens when we believe we are guilty. Guilt says this is so horrific, I cannot even look at it. We are so overwhelmed with self-hatred that we repress it, and whatever we repress, we project. Again, guilt ensures that we will continue to do what made us guilty in the first place. That is what Freud called repetition compulsion.

Remorse, the way I am using the term, recognizes that I did something that was a mistake, not something that was sinful—it probably hurt other people, it certainly hurt me, and I don't want to do it again. We can call it "healthy guilt" when you look at something you have done, and rather than feel guilty and drive it underground because you are such a reprehensible worm, you say, "This was a mistake, and I understand now why I did it. I don't want to do this again because it causes too much pain for others and for me." At that point, it is not guilt. It is simply saying you made a mistake and don't want to do it again. That is what I would call remorse. Guilt, on the other hand, ensures that you will continue to do it. The whole idea of looking with Jesus is to change the ego's perception of guilt to his perception of remorse.

The entire Course, from cover to cover, is simply telling us over and over again: "You have made a mistake. I am not judging you for it. You are not evil, sinful people, but you have made a mistake, and I will explain to you why you made the mistake: It is because you are afraid of love. I will show you all the different forms in which the mistake has been made—all your defenses and all the forms of specialness. I am showing these to you so that you can look at them with me without judgment." That's remorse. It's not the mistake in form. Guilt always attaches to specifics and then represses the guilt. Remorse says this was a mistake in content: I chose the wrong teacher, and that's why I did and said all these things, but I don't want to do that anymore, because I now see the consequences of choosing my ego. I see what it costs me. I don't feel the peace of God. I don't feel His Love, and that's what I want. I now use my mistakes as a classroom where I can grow and learn so I don't repeat them. Guilt keeps me imprisoned in itself.

Again, once you feel guilt, you must repress it, and whatever you repress, you will project. It will find its way out. You want to look at your mistake and not call it a sin. Simply say, "This is not something I want to do again." Practice what it says at the beginning of Chapter 18. This section, "The Substitute Reality," starts by talking about the original error. The next paragraph talks about all the forms the original error has taken, all our forms of specialness, but now the context is the original error. We want to apply this to all the specific forms of the original error of separating from Love.

"Call it not sin but madness, for such it was and so it still remains. Invest it not with guilt, for guilt implies it was accomplished in reality. And above all, be not afraid of it" (T-18.I.6:7-9).

That is the definition of remorse. I say this was insanity; this never could have happened, and I don't have to be afraid of it anymore. This will ensure that I never repeat it. If I call what I did sinful and feel guilty, I will have to be afraid of it, and am then setting the stage for it to continually recur, not necessarily in the same form, but that underlying self-hatred will find its way out through what I say and do.

Thus, the idea is to look at your mistakes and recognize they are mistakes. Call it not sin but madness. Invest it not with guilt . . . . And above all, be not afraid of it. As I go through my day and become aware of all the different ways that I reflect my belief in the reality of the tiny, mad idea—all the times I get angry, mildly annoyed, anxious, fearful, forgetful, am insensitive to someone, all the different ways I am unloving—I can look at that in myself and not judge it. I don't call myself dirty Course names: you're guilty, you're defending against the truth, etc. I am unlearning the mistake I and everyone else made in that original instant when we looked at the tiny, mad idea, were horrified by it, called it sinful, and took it seriously. The minute we took it seriously, it was as if this tiny wisp of nothing became enmeshed in concrete—it became real and solid and sinister. We therefore had to run like hell from it, and we made up a hell to run to, which is the world and the body. All of this was to escape from a thought of sin that never happened, all because we took the tiny, mad idea seriously.

Again, the problem was not the thought of being separated, because that never happened. How could what did not happen and could never happen be taken seriously? That was the problem—that we took it seriously. That gets transformed into our world by all the different ways we are unloving and unkind, whether to ourselves or other people. Being right-minded means being wrong-minded and recognizing our wrong-minded decisions, but not feeling guiltyabout them. I don't judge myself for choosing my ego, I don't justify it, I don't indulge it, and I don't rationalize it. I say, "This is what I did, and I don't want to do it again." That is the distinction between guilt and remorse. Guilt roots you in the world of sin that ensures you will continue to be unloving and unkind. Remorse says, "I made a mistake. That's all it was." That is remembering to laugh. I just made a mistake!

**Part XII
1. Resistance**

**Q:** Can you talk about the distinction between resistance to the Course if it is your path and resistance to the Course if it isn't your path? And then could you tell the story about Helen and the trees?

**A:** An excellent question! Practically all of you in this room have felt attracted to *A Course in Miracles* as your spiritual path and probably are not going to go back on that. You feel it speaks to you, and yet since we are all human and we all have split minds like everyone else, we all have resistance to it because it is the truth.

The section called "The Last Unanswered Question" in Chapter 21 of the text poses four questions. The first three are relatively simple to answer, but then Jesus says, you may not have answered the last one yet, which is, "*And do I want to see what I denied****because****it is the truth?*" He says that you do not realize that to answer "yes" to that question means to say "not no" (T-21.VII.12:4). In other words, if you are really saying that you want to see what you denied, that you want to see the truth, then you must first look at the denial of the truth—the ego—and say you don't want that anymore.

In fact, that really goes to the heart of the whole process of the Course. I often like to say that there is nothing positive in this Course. What is truly positive is God, and God does not play a part in the theory of the Course. God is not the problem. We don't know anything about God or reality, so there is not very much said about what God is like or what Heaven is. God is mentioned on every page, certainly, but not in terms of what God is, because that is not the issue. What is positive in this course is the *undoing of what is negative*. This is not called *A Course in Love*, but *A Course in Miracles*, because love is the truth. The miracle is the correction for the untruth. The beginning of Chapter 28 says, "The miracle does nothing. All it does is to undo" (T-28.I.1:1-2).

We could say the same thing about forgiveness. Forgiveness does nothing. In fact, the line I almost always quote from the workbook states, "Forgiveness…is still, and quietly does nothing. It merely looks, and waits, and judges not" (W-pII.1.4:1,3). Thus, forgiveness is the correction, or the undoing of the ego's judgment. Everything in the right mind, which is what this course is about, is the undoing or the correction for everything in the wrong mind. The Course says that the ego speaks first and is wrong, and the Holy Spirit is the Answer (T-5.VI.3:5–4:2).

Therefore, what is positive in the Course, again, is the undoing of the negative. Another line I frequently quote from Chapter 16 says, "Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it" (T-16.IV.6:1). Our task is not to seek for love, which is Heaven, God, truth, and Oneness, but to seek and find all of the barriers we have placed between ourselves and love, which is the ego thought system, and in the context of that particular passage, the special relationship. When we find what we have placed between ourselves and love, we look at it without judgment, and then it disappears.

So, do I want to see what I denied *because* it is the truth? That is where the resistance to the Course is found. We all have chosen this as our spiritual path because we recognize the truth here. Whether we understand the theory of the Course or not, we recognize there is truth here, but that does not stop us from doing the exact opposite of what it says. One of the clear messages of this course is that we not judge. Well, that does not stop us, right? This course is all about undoing our special relationships. That does not stop us from continuing to indulge them, and especially to develop a special relationship with the Course itself. The fact that we do the very thing this Course, which we believe is the truth and is our spiritual path, tells us not to do, reflects our resistance. We resist the Course because it is our course, because it is our pathway home.

On the other hand, people could be resistant to the Course for right-minded reasons—because it is *not* their path. Even though part of you swears up and down that you love this course—it is the answer—there is something inside you that says this is not for you. As you know, the Course says it is only one path among many thousands (M-1.4), which is always a very impressive statement given the absolute nature of so many other religions. The Course says it is not the only form of truth. So this course may not be for you, but then you stick to it because of pride, because all your friends are students of it, or because you think you are going to be a failure and then Jesus will be angry at you, or because you hold this in such high esteem and this means you're flunking the Course, etc., when the truth of the matter is that you are just resisting it, and maybe you should accept that. The problem is that you don't know which one it is.

I remember something that happened to me many years ago when I was still laboring under the assumption that I was going to become a monk. This was before I met Gloria, and actually before I saw the Course. I had met Helen and Bill, but I had not seen the Course yet. I was staying in a Trappist monastery in Israel. I thought I would just spend a week there over Christmas, and I ended up feeling very comfortable, very much at home. The abbot wanted me to stay there, and I really thought for a while that I would. I was there for three months even though I had not expected to spend that much time there. It was a French-speaking monastery, and I was not very adept at the language, but I did speak some French. The abbot, who could speak English, said to me, "If you are really going to stay here, you have to study French," which was obvious. I could read it better than I could speak it, but I would have to master the language. I could speak enough French to converse with him and the monks about passing the salt, or to ask, "What did you do today?" (which one was not even supposed to ask), but to have a more serious conversation, I could not.

So the abbot gave me some French books to study, and maybe I opened them once, but I just could not study them. Now I'm a very good student; I'm smart; and I already knew French, and I thought I was motivated to master the language so I could stay in the monastery. After a week or two of this, it occurred to me that two things were going on. And this is really the gist of the issue. Either I was resisting staying in the monastery, or I was not supposed to stay in the monastery, and that was why I was not studying French. It took me a while before I figured out that I was not studying French because I was not supposed to be there. I did eventually leave, one thing led to another, and I ended up back in the States. That is when I saw the Course for the first time.

But you don't always know, and when you don't know, as long as it is practically possible, don't make a decision. Sometimes you don't have a choice. Circumstances can demand that you make a decision right away, but very often you don't have to. You can delay, and you should basically assume that you will know the answer when you know the answer. And so in terms of the Course, if you find yourself resisting the Course over and over again, you should at least entertain the possibility that maybe this is not for you. It's not a sin. This is not the only way to get to Heaven, and if you think for one minute that *Course in Miracles* students have a speedier way to get to Heaven than anyone else, you don't know many *Course in Miracles* students. It is only one path among many thousands. So there is no easy answer.

Basically, it is the same question as "How do I know whether it is my ego or the Holy Spirit?" How do you discern? It is more helpful to say, "I don't know yet" than to rush into an answer when you don't really have to. It is helpful to at least open yourself up to the possibility that you are resisting the Course when you keep forgetting the workbook lesson, reading the text and falling asleep, not liking the language. You are having these experiences either because this *is* your pathway home or because this is *not* your pathway home, and you should listen to that. Again, there is no right and wrong, but you should at least be open to the possibility.

**2. The Story of Helen and the Trees**

Most people would not know what this is all about, and it's interesting that this has come up now, because the next newsletter article will be on that very same theme. [Editor's note: *The Lighthouse*, Dec. 2009]. It is the culmination of a series of Helen's experiences that I was actually able to share with her. It began one evening while we were sitting on her couch. That was the time of the day, after all our shopping had been done and she had gotten all her diatribes against Bill out of the way for the day, when we would sit on the couch and pray. That is when she would feel Jesus' presence, and sometimes she would come up with very interesting things.

This evening, she suddenly went into another state. She described herself standing with me. She was Helen, but she had on a white dress that was tattered, torn, and dirty. I was a boy. It was not clear whether I was her son, nephew, or just a very close friend, but it was like a mother-son relationship. We were standing on the grounds of Qumran, which is where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in Israel. Actually, the summer before that, Helen, Bill and his friend, Helen's husband Louis, and I were in Israel. While we were there, Helen had two experiences that were striking:

1) One was about her looking over to the Dead Sea, which one could see from Qumran, and saying, "The height is wrong." I forget whether she said it should be higher or lower, but she said it was wrong. Bill opened up the guidebook, and sure enough, it said that two thousand years ago the Dead Sea was at the height Helen said it should have been.

2) The other experience took place while I was alone with her in Qumran, the site of the ruins of the Essene community that was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. The Essene community was a Jewish community, a kind of monastic community, which was unusual in Judaism. It existed before the time of Jesus. They were very strict. Some of the scrolls that have been found talk about a teacher of righteousness who would come, which Christians like to think was a prophecy of Jesus' coming. There is also some New Age thinking that says Jesus was an Essene. They were destroyed by the Romans, but in the ruins you can see where the library and the kitchen were, where they slept, etc. Helen said to walk with her, and it turned out to be a graveyard. She felt really drawn to walk by the graveyard, and then she became very agitated. She said to me, "It  (meaning Jesus) said: 'Let the dead bury the dead'." Helen did not believe in past lives—the whole idea made her very uncomfortable—but she had a distinct feeling that she had been buried there. So "Let the dead bury the dead," was really Jesus saying the past is over, let's move on.

In this sequence, which began with Helen describing to me what she was seeing, as she described it, I could actually see it with her: We were standing at Qumran looking at all these ruins. Again, she was dirty and her dress was torn. What happened after that took place over a series of successive evenings. We went through a journey heading north. We walked by the Jordan River, and all kinds of things happened, some of which I forget, but one of them I do remember very clearly. We were walking on the shores of the Jordan, and on the beach was a starfish that had a broken arm. Helen felt it was her function to put this starfish back in the water with the understanding that it would regenerate. That was a very meaningful experience for her. One day—I was not with her—she was with Jesus on Fifth Avenue in New York. She went into one of the jewelry stores, and she felt that Jesus bought her a gold star. (Actually, it's the star that I wear now.) She felt that was his gift to her. For her, the star was a symbol of Jesus, and I think that the starfish was, in a sense, a symbol of the broken Christ, and she was doing her part to heal the Sonship by putting it back.

The whole series culminated when we reached Lower Galilee, which was the biblical site where Jesus was raised—Nazareth, according to the Bible—, and where he did a lot of his ministry, a lot of his preaching. We reached a grove of trees. It was very, very beautiful. Helen suddenly burst into tears, and in the midst of the trees, she saw the figure of Jesus. She said to me, "I never thought I'd see those trees again." That's the story.

The journey really represents—and, again, I don't remember a lot of the specific incidents—a journey from the ego to the Holy Spirit, from the wrong mind to the right mind, beginning with the destruction of Qumran, which in terms of how Helen felt within these visions, was really devastation. It is almost like going from crucifixion to resurrection, and it culminated in this incredibly moving experience for her that she never thought she would see those trees again. It is as if the innocence we thought had been destroyed, that we had thrown away and was forever lost, we would now have again.

The sentence "Together we will disappear into the Presence beyond the veil, not to be lost but found; not to be seen, but known" (T-19.IV-D.19:1) is about the innocence we thought we had lost because we had thrown it away, and all of a sudden, it is found. I don't think we can have a more important or joyous experience than suddenly recognizing that the innocence we thought we would never, ever get back is there. It comes from an experience of really knowing, almost for the first time, that you are truly forgiven. I don't think there is anything in this world that can match the sheer joy and happiness, or could be anywhere nearly as moving as that experience of knowing that no matter what awful things you believe you've done, or what awful thing you believe you've become, the love and the light in you have never gone out, and that innocence has always been there.