**Miracles versus Magic**

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**Part I**
**Introduction**

The prominent topic in this discussion of miracles and magic will be *form and content*. The theme of *form and content*goes right to the heart of *A Course in Miracles*, and, in a sense, we can say that the purpose of *A Course in Miracles* is to teach us the difference between miracles and magic. One can lay at the doorsteps of magic a great deal of the confusion that students have had with the Course, almost from the beginning, if not from the very beginning. It is one of the key ways of distinguishing the thought system of the Holy Spirit from the thought system of the ego, and, again, is very easily misunderstood. Thus, every so often I like to do a workshop on this theme, or variations of it.

We will begin with a definition of form and content: *form* refers to behavior or materiality, anything to do with the body or the physical world; whereas *content* has to do with the mind. We could say, then, that magic deals with form and the miracle deals with content. Indeed, we could say that the purpose of magic—because everything in the ego system is purposive—is to keep us from the content, from the mind. That is why magic is so attractive. We are not talking about the traditional idea of magic as some kind of hocus pocus, but magic as denoting the ego's hocus pocus, which is to have us believe that something is where it is not. The hallmark of the magician is illusion—the idea that we see something that *is not* there and what we do not see *is* there. The skill of the magician has to do with the ability to fool the audience and have it think that miraculous things are happening, when all that is really happening is that the hand is quicker than the eye. The magician is very adept at perpetrating the illusion. When we look at the ego thought system in that light, we realize that is exactly what the ego does. The purpose of the ego system is to have us look where it (the problem) is not.

A definition that I gave many years ago for the world, which I have always liked, and refer to every once in a while, is that the world is a "maladaptive solution to a nonexistent problem." That is what magic is. The world is a kind of cosmic expression of the principle of magic: a "maladaptive solution to a nonexistent problem." It is "maladaptive" because it does not really work (*mal* meaning "bad," and *adaptive* meaning "adapting to something so as to relate to or live with it"). We thus live in the world as a way of adapting to the problem of the ego; but it does not work, because it is an attempt to solve a problem that does not exist. The world then, is an illusory solution to an illusory problem.

Looking at things from this perspective enables us to recognize how absolutely insane the ego thought system is; but even more to the point, how insane we *all* are for believing in it. Indeed, everything we do here in this world is a "maladaptive solution to a nonexistent problem." Even when we do something we think is positive, for example studying *A Course in Miracles*, very quickly it can end up being just as maladaptive as anything else. If we are not careful, the slippery ego has a way of making inroads into something that is only positive and good, and turns it around so that it ends up being exactly the opposite. That is when students of *A Course in Miracles* become confused between miracles and magic, and wind up using the Course as a magical solution for the problem, rather than the miraculous one that is its purpose is to foster.

Again, what constitutes a miracle, at least at this point in our discussion, is that it brings us back to the mind. Magic would always have us root our attention in what is external, in the world. As I have mentioned many other times, that is one of the ways the ego has us use the Holy Spirit, Jesus, God, or this course. Rather than use Them as a means to choose the miracle and get back to our mind, They become the means of rooting us still further in the world of illusion. This is achieved by using the Holy Spirit, Jesus, or this course to solve problems *here*, the exact opposite of the purpose of the Course. How can we solve problems of this world or of the body; how can we make a better world, a better, happier, or healthier body if it is all made up, which is what the Course teaches? To use Them for this intent is the "maladaptive solution to a nonexistent problem."

At the beginning of the text, Jesus spends time talking about this, although he does not always use the terms. There is one passage where he specifically talks about "level confusion" (see T-2.IV.2). Usually when I speak about confusing levels, I am referring to confusing truth and illusion, but in the Course when Jesus discusses level confusion, he is talking about confusing the level of the body and the level of the mind: in one passage he specifically talks about sickness as an example of level confusion, where we think the body is sick, when in truth, it is the *mind* that is sick (see T-28.II.11). If we think the body is sick, whether the emotional or the physical body, and we address our concerns there, that is magic. We will also see that sickness itself is a magical solution. Approaching sickness as having to do with the body is to confuse levels, because that is saying that a problem exists on one level, namely, the body, when it really exists on another level, which is the mind. In the miracle principles that begin the text, Jesus talks about this, that the purpose of the miracle is to undo this level confusion by pointing our attention to where the problem is, which is in the mind (see principles 12, 23).

Once we address the problem in the mind, we can also accept the solution to the problem, which is also in the mind. However, if the solution is in the mind, and we remove the problem from the mind, put it in the body, and seek to resolve the problem there, then the real solution, which is the acceptance of the Atonement in our mind, is impossible. Of course, what the ego does is take the problem from the mind, put it in the body, and say this is how we solve it—and then we do solve it. Then the ego loudly proclaims, as did our former President a few years ago, "Mission accomplished!" Just as President Bush made a mistake, so do we all make a mistake when we think that the mission has been accomplished—that we have solved the problem. All that it ends up doing is making things even worse, because the ongoing problem, which rests in our mind, stays there. If it stays there and we are not aware of it, then it is free to do its thing. It runs rampant in what Freud referred to as the unconscious. It does all its ugly things in the unconscious, which have a way of seeping through into our awareness, except we do not know what is seeping through. Thus, we continually generate more and more problems that we are sure exist in the body or the world. We continually seek to solve the problems in the body and the world, not addressing at all the underlying problem in the mind.

The worst thing about magic is that it does not work. And even worse is the fact that we *think* it works. It is bad enough that it does not work, but we *think* it works, which means we will never look again at where the problem *really* is. Of course the ego is no one's fool. If we do not look at where the problem is, in the mind, then we will never be able to find the answer to the problem, which is also in the mind. The ego does not care about the problem—it does not want us to get to the answer; so it uses the problem in the mind as a cover for the answer, also in the mind. Then it takes the problem in the mind, projects it out and puts it in the world. Once we believe it is in the world and we have no memory that there is a mind, then we have no choice but to continually seek to solve the problem on the level where it is *not*. That is magic. Anything we do to make our lives better in this world is magic: "a maladaptive solution to a nonexistent problem." It is not only that the problem is nonexistent, but where we think the problem is, is also nonexistent.

What Jesus does for us in *A Course in Miracles* is unveil what the whole ego thought system is about. The problem is not what the ego does, but that we are *not aware* of what the ego does. The ego does nothing, but we think it is something, and therefore Jesus has to show us that it is nothing. Even more to the point, Jesus has to show us why we are so invested in thinking the ego is something, and that what the ego does is something, demanding attention and solution. Thus, Jesus exposes what the ego is up to. First he shows us that the solution the ego is attempting does not work; then he shows us that the problem this solution is addressing does not exist; and finally, he reveals that the place where this problem is supposed to exist does not exist either. In the words Jesus uses in the workbook to describe time, we can say that the world is "a vast illusion in which figures come and go as if by magic" (W-pI.158.4:1). And the whole thing is magic because we are seeing something that is literally not there. If we watch a magician sawing a woman in half, our eyes see a woman being sawed in half, except we know that a woman is not being sawed in half—it is a trick. Likewise, in this world we see people being "sawed in half" all the time, but what we are seeing is not there. But because we think it is there, we then have to do something about what we are seeing. Once again, what we have in *A Course in Miracles* is a way of seeing what is really going on. The woman is not being sawed in half; and things are not being done on the stage that is the world. Things are being done some place else that we do not see. The miracle, then, takes us back to where the action really is, which is in the mind.

**Part II**
**Introduction (cont.)**

Magic works not only on the level of form, but also on the level of content, in the mind. The mind is split into two parts, what the early chapters of the text refer to as the wrong mind and the right mind, the home of the ego and the home of the Holy Spirit. The entire wrong mind is also magic, a magical solution to a nonexistent problem. What the world is attempting to solve, which boils down to the problem of guilt in our minds, is also nonexistent, and is also magic. Guilt is not something that just appears. Guilt is something that is purposive, and is made by the ego. It is important to remember that when we speak of the ego, we are not talking about a separate entity: the ego is us. The ego is the part of our mind that likes being on its own, autonomous, independent, separate, unique, differentiated, and, of course, it likes being special. That is the ego. Thus, the ego is not a kind of entity or strange thing that has invaded us. We are the ego.

We, as the one ego mind, invented guilt as a solution to a problem, and therefore guilt itself is magic. It was made to ensure that we would feel so terrible about ourselves and our mind that we would want to leave the mind, in a magical attempt to flee from the horrific consequences of our guilt. That is the purpose of guilt: to convince us that there will be terrible consequences because of it. These consequences are so horrific—nothing less than annihilation at the hands of God—that we cannot wait to get away from it. The ego's solution—"the maladaptive solution to the nonexistent problem of guilt"—is to flee the mind and make up a world. But guilt itself is made up. Why does the ego want us to be afraid of remaining in our mind?—because if we remain in our mind, we will change our mind about the ego. The part of us that likes being separated, alone, on our own, and free is terrified that it will lose its freedom. The only way we can lose our freedom is if another part of our mind, which we refer to as the decision maker, will choose against the ego. That is the fear. If we choose against the ego, then we must choose for the Holy Spirit, the memory of who we really are. The ego is the thought of who we really are not.

Choosing the ego, thus, is choosing nothing, because we are choosing who we are not. Choosing against the ego is choosing who we are, as God created us. That is the reality and the truth. Anything else has to be the denial of reality and truth, which automatically makes it an illusion. Guilt, then, becomes the magical attempt to protect and solve the presumed threat of losing this imaginary and illusory self. Thus, you can see that right from the beginning the whole thing is made up. We choose a self that does not exist, and then we build a kingdom and a castle on what does not exist. Then we seek to protect this kingdom—to protect what does not exist. Moreover, we believe there are all kinds of monsters, threats, and other things around us that can invade our kingdom, against which we have to protect ourselves. All these monsters and terrible things in the world that we are so afraid of are nothing more than the projection of the monster of guilt, which is in our mind, and made up in order to protect the self, which, again, is made up.

Thus, it is just one made-up thing leading to another made-up thing, leading to another—layers and layers of defenses and attempts to protect ourselves against nothing. Every attempt to protect ourselves is magic. But, again, the principal characteristic of magic is that it does not work. It cannot work because it is set up not to work. It is protecting nothing from nothing, which means magic will always fail. However, because we do not know that it is protecting nothing, by invoking solutions of nothing against perceived problems that are nothing, we continue to play the game over and over again, which is why nothing ever changes in the world.

To state it again, what the miracle does is expose all of this. That is what A Course in Miracles does. A line I often quote says that the miracle "merely looks on devastation, and reminds the mind that what it sees is false" (W-pII.13.1:3). We could say that the miracle looks on magic and reminds the mind—the decision maker in our mind—that what it sees is false. It exposes the lie. It looks on the world's devastation as a reflection or a shadow of the devastation of guilt in our mind, and gently reminds us that what we are looking at is not true. If it is not true, it does not need a defense, nor do we. We do not have to implore Jesus or the Holy Spirit to help us with the defense, or to help us with the body or the world.

What has been wrong with Christianity right from the beginning—as with every formal religion right from the beginning—is that once the founder or the visionary is gone, the followers invoke magical gods. It is a magical god if that god, its representative, or the teaching of the representative has anything whatsoever to do with the world, cares about the world, sees the world, worries about the world, fights with the world, and/or does anything about the body. It is only a magical god who would "count the hairs on your head," care about war, cancer, or sickness. How could the true God care about something that does not exist? Only a magical god does. Unfortunately, most of the gods that Course in Miraclesstudents get involved with—whether they call it God, the Holy Spirit, Jesus, or anything else—are all magic, because they are appeals for these people to do something about the world.

Why do we continually appeal to magic and make up gods to be magicians? Why do we not see that the world is a "maladaptive solution to a nonexistent problem"? Why do not we see that our physical individual life is a maladaptive solution to an individual problem? There is a very good reason: because we are children of magic. We were born in magic. Magic was the principle that gave birth to us, so why would we choose anything but magic? If I believe I am magic, then of course I want a god to be magical, too. In fact, I cannot understand a god or a Jesus who is not magical. I cannot understand this book, this course, unless it is magical, because I am magical. Thus, when Jesus tells us in the text, "You cannot even think of God without a body, or in some form you think you recognize" (T-18.VIII.1:7), he is talking about magic. Of course I have to think about God as a body in some way, because *I*am a body.

What is the body? The body is part of the ego's magical solution to the nonexistent problem of guilt. This is not called A Course in Magic; it is called A Course in Miracles. We are not encouraged to ask the Holy Spirit or Jesus to do things for us. That would be what The Song of Prayer pamphlet would imply is asking-to-destroy. In the first chapter of the pamphlet, Jesus talks about asking, although he does not use the phrase asking-to-destroy. In the second chapter, which is about forgiveness, he does talk about "forgiveness-to-destroy," but in the first chapter, when he talks about asking God or the Holy Spirit for specifics, he says that that is the same as looking on sin and then forgiving it (S-1.I.4:2), which he later calls "forgiveness-to-destroy" (S-2.II). Asking for specifics is asking-to-destroy, because it is an attempt to destroy the power of the miracle. It is an attempt to once again crucify Jesus by rendering him totally impotent. How could he possibly help us if we prevent him from going to the one place where he can help us, which is in the mind? Actually, we do not prevent him from going there—he is already there. What we do is prevent ourselves from going there. The whole purpose of this course is to convince us that we want to go back to the mind, because that is where the true solution lies. Everything and anything else is magic.

The reason The Song of Prayer was written a year after the Course's publication was that people were not understanding what prayer is and what asking the Holy Spirit means. Well-meaning Course in Miraclesstudents were already becoming miserable "sinners"—like twenty-one hundred years of Christians—because they were asking for specifics and invoking a god of magic. I assure you, Jesus does not care what you do in this world, because he knows you are not in this world. He cares about the decision you make in your mind, because whatever you do in this world, which is not even here, is the reflection of a decision that your mind makes. That is the cause.

What the miracle does is drag us all, kicking and screaming like little babies who will do anything to get their way, from our fixation on the world and the body and all the problems, both personal and collective. The miracle drags us—against what we think is our better judgment—from the world to the mind. It takes us from the world of magic to the world of healing. The problem, once again, is that we do not want to go. Thus, one of Jesus' great challenges for all students of this course is to convince us that we really do want to learn what he is teaching, because we do not think we want to learn what he is teaching. We want him to teach us what we want to learn, but we do not want to learn what he is teaching, so he has to convince us. In other words, to use Freud's very important term, he tries to help us overcome our resistance. You cannot overcome something when you are not aware of it. One of the most important values of the workbook is that if you really pay attention to what you are doing and to what you arenot doing, you will recognize how deeply resistant you are to the exercises. And if you are not deeply resistant to the exercises, then either you are not aware of your resistance, or you are so spiritually advanced that you do not even have to bother doing them. That is the real value of the workbook. There is no way we could accept the one-year mind-training program that is the purpose of the workbook if we were not aware of our resistance to learning it. We want a workbook of magic, and the workbook seems to subscribe to that—it deals with 365 lessons for a calendar year, as if there really were a calendar year. Why is it 365 and not 387 or 242?—because we have decided that a year is 365 days!

Again, the workbook comes in a magical form. It is very much governed by our conception of time. Jesus talks about minutes, hours, and days. Each 24-hour day is structured for one year. It gives us time to sleep, but otherwise it is very carefully structured—all based on our conception of time, which he tells us, as I just quoted, is a magic trick, a "vast illusion" (W-pI.158.4:1). Jesus uses our concepts and our structures, which are magical, to lead us beyond them, to the miracle. Again, what is extremely important is to pay careful attention, not so much to what the workbook says, although obviously you should, but to how you react to what the workbook says. This means not just intellectually, but personally: how often you forget; how willing you are to trivialize certain things, or to make other things seem to be of great magnitude. Watch how you approach the workbook. That will help you get in touch with your resistance.

**Part III**
**Introduction (conclusion)**

Referring to Freud again, he learned right at the beginning of his analytic work how important it was to deal with his patients' resistance, because otherwise they would not get better. It was a brilliant insight. You find the same insight in A Course in Miracles; except it is a little more subtle in the Course. It is important to pay attention to your resistance. You do not want the miracle; you want magic. You want this course to work magically. You want Jesus to be like Merlin and wave a magic wand to make your ego go away. What students typically want to do is turn over and bring to the Holy Spirit all their problems so that they do not have to deal with them. That is why there is that very important passage in the text right at the beginning of "The Fear of Redemption" in Chapter 13:

"You may wonder why it is so crucial that you look upon your hatred and realize its full extent. You may also think that it would be easy enough for the Holy Spirit to show it to you, and to dispel it without the need for you to raise it to awareness yourself" (T-13.III.1:1-2).

The reason these two lines are in the Course is that Jesus knows his students. He knows that we do not want to look at our ego but would rather just give it to him, in the magical hope that that will take care of it. Well, the very fact that we do not want to look at it is giving it a reality, a power, and a strength it does not have. Therefore, there is no way Jesus can take it from us. We have to bring it to him, meaning we have to hold it in our hands and look at it, and then give it to him. That is the difference between magic and the miracle. Magic wants him to take care of it without our doing anything.

It is very important—crucial—that you look at your resistance to learning this course. Learning it intellectually is the first problem; but after that the real problem is the experience of it. There is tremendous resistance to having this course permeate your life, your whole way of thinking and perceiving, and, ultimately, your whole way of behaving. If you are not aware of that, the workbook will help you become aware of it. However, if you are compulsive, then you will see to it that you think of God five or six times every hour, as a number of lessons would tell you, or you will buy a special watch that will go off every ten minutes so that you will think of God. That is not what Jesus is talking about, and not what he wants you to do. He is not interested in how many times you think of the lesson each day. He is much more interested in how many times you do not think of the lesson each day and then forgive yourself for it.

Again, it is extremely important that you recognize your investment in magic, because you are a creature of magic. What literally made the body was the magical attempt to flee from the wrath of God in your mind, which comes from your belief in your guilt, which comes from your belief that you have sinfully and selfishly separated from God. None of that happened. That is why, again, we speak about the body and the world as a "maladaptive solution to a nonexistent problem." Why, in your right mind, would you ever want Jesus or the Holy Spirit to help you with a nonexistent problem or with a nonexistent solution to a nonexistent problem? Why would you want Them to help you find a better solution to a nonexistent problem? Would it not make much more sense to ask Jesus to help you look at your mind and your guilt so that you could recognize at last that there is nothing there? That makes sense. That is not magic. What you want to do is borrow his eyes and share his vision, so that, with him, you can look on devastation and realize that what you are looking on is false—it never happened (W-pII.13.1:3).

To restate this, what Jesus helps us to do in this course is examine the core of our ego thought system, which is our resistance to letting it go. Since the ego is us, why did we make it be this self? Why did we identify with it? There has to be a reason. The explanation for our identifying with the ego is the same reason for the resistance to letting go of the ego: cherishing our separated self. That is why the Course spends so much time talking about the ego. I have been saying for many years that for a spiritual text to come from such an advanced source to deal with the ego sounds incredible, but that is what this course does. It is written for spiritual children, spiritual infants. In that sense, it is written on a very low level, even though it comes from the highest level, from an ego-free level. But it is all about the ego and learning to identify its thought system, learning to understand how and why its thought system works, and the purpose for that thought system; and finally, to understand at last, why we do not want to let it go. The Psychotherapy pamphlet explains why we cherish our guilt and hug it close—that is what he says: "its hugging-close" (P-2.VI.1:3). Why would we cherish guilt when it is nonexistent, just another form of magic? We cherish it because it clothes our magical self.

That is why the distinction between miracles and magic is so crucial. Again, it is very helpful to understand this because that is what will explain why almost all students of the Course get caught in turning this into a course in magic instead of being what it is supposed to be: a course in miracles. This distinction is very simple. Anything that takes your attention into the world, into bodies, into relationships between bodies, into an inner teacher who counsels you and directs you on the proper use of the body, is all magic. The focus of this course is to begin where we are, which is in the world, so that we will withdraw our perception from the world back to its source. As the line I quote very often states of the world: it is "an outside picture of an inward condition" (T-21.in.1:5). The Course begins where we think we are, which is in the world, in the body, in relationship to other bodies, coping with the world. It helps us realize, number one, that this is all magic: a magical solution to an inner problem of guilt.

When we allow ourselves to be led back from the world to the mind, we realize that the problem of guilt, for which the world is a magical solution, is also a magical solution to the problem of the power of the mind to choose against the ego. That is why guilt was made and why we place it on the throne of our self, the center of our kingdom. Guilt protects who we think we are by ensuring through its monstrous nature that we will never go back to our mind to change it. Thus, guilt is the magical solution to the problem of the mind's power to choose. What we are trying to protect is the choice for illusions. We are using magic to protect an illusion, and the magic itself is an illusion, protecting an illusion. Then we need another form of magic to protect us from the first magic. Thus, the ego makes up magic, makes up guilt as the magical attempt to protect our mind from choosing again; it then says this magical guilt is a monster, so now we need another monster—magical—to protect us from guilt. Voila! out comes a world that is monstrous—monstrously cruel and vicious, filled with pain and suffering, culminating in death.

Remember that wonderful line at the beginning of Chapter 13 after Jesus describes this world. He says, "If this were the real world, God would be cruel" (T-13.in.3:1). Yet that is the world everyone worships and wants to save, the world to which everyone wants to bring A Course in Miracles. Why would you want to bring A Course in Miracles into a nonexistent world filled with nonexistent people? You want to bring the Course to the only place it can help, which is in your mind. The "you" that Jesus addresses in this course all the way through is not the "you" who is reading it, studying it, falling asleep while reading it, trying to practice it, or trying to hit people over the head with it. The "you" he is talking about is the "you" in your mind that chose magic and now needs a miracle to correct the mistake. That is whom the Course was meant for, not the world.

I always like to recall people's attention to the question in the manual: "How Many Teachers of God Are Needed to Save the World?" (M-12). The answer is one. That one is not Jesus, but he is an example of one. The one is you. That is the one. Jesus does not say "many people." He never told Helen and Bill, as he supposedly told the disciples, to go out into the world and preach to the gentiles, which he never said, but that is what the world thinks he said. Why would he want you to preach to a world that does not exist, and is filled with people who are already imbued with magic? A Course in Miracles is meant only for the "you" that is the decision-making part of your mind that made the wrong choice. That is why this course is all about choosing again, from beginning to end. It is all about the power of the mind to choose.

In response to Helen asking Jesus to intervene magically to help her with her magical fears, he said to her, "Why would I teach you to depreciate the power of your mind, which would go against everything in this course?" (originally meant for her personally, now in Chapter 2: see T-2.VII.1). Thus, Jesus was saying to her, "Don't ask me to do that. Number one, I cannot do that. Furthermore, since the purpose of this course is to teach you how powerful your mind is, why are you asking me to depreciate it?" We depreciate it when we negate the mind's power to make up a world and all the problems in this world. Then we try to circumvent this mind's power by solving the problems in the world; and even better, getting Jesus, the Holy Spirit, God, this course, or any other spirituality to intercede for us, to intervene in the world and fix things—whether it is something trivial like getting a parking space, something seemingly important as healing cancer or AIDS, bringing about world peace, or ending world poverty and all the cruelty and injustice in the world. He does not do any of that. He does not care about any of that. He knows the difference, as did Plato twenty-five hundred years ago, between appearance and reality. Magic is the world of appearance, the world of illusion. That is what we think we see, hear, and understand; and that is what we think we think about. That is the world of appearances, the world of magic. A Course in Miracles leads us to the world of miracles, which redirects our attention from the world back to the mind.

**Part IV**
**Discussion**

Any questions or comments before I go on? Anyone want to make a case for magic?

**Q:** The thought of my doing magic day in and day out has made me very anxious and apprehensive, which I gather is tapping into my resistance. I have not defined myself in terms of everything I do being magic. I am forgetting the right mind on occasion.

**A:** Yes, the anxiety and the fear are a legitimate response to the realization that everything you do is magic. It is only a short hop, skip, and a jump from there to understanding that if everything you do is magic, then everything you are is magic too. Then you don't know what you would be without magic. And it gets worse, because breathing actually is magic. Magic is a pejorative term and it does not sound very nice. Then to be told that everything is magic and that we use the Course, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit for magical reasons could be a little threatening.

**Q:** So feeling  guilt about that is the defense. Do we always have to go through that, or can we just simply go to our minds and say it is a choice?

**A:** After a while, you will be able to do this process more quickly. Be careful, however, that you do not skip over steps, because you know you are afraid of looking. Eventually it becomes easier and easier to identify the reliance on magic and the need to defend against the guilt. When you quickly get to that and recognize that this is really nothing, then it disappears. But again, you have to be careful that you are not skipping over steps, which is why I was emphasizing the importance of looking at your resistance. If you are not aware of the resistance, you will think that you are really doing what this course is saying, when in effect, all you are doing is just putting on another cover. Recognizing resistance is extremely important.

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**Q:** I always feel very hypocritical, because I know what magic is, and I know that when I am taking vitamins or whatever I am doing that I am engaging in magic, and that it is not doing anything. Yet I continue to do it. I mean, how can I stop the hypocrisy?

**A:** By not calling it hypocritical.

**Q:** But it is. Why do something that you know is not doing anything?

**A:** How about saying it is just silly, and behind the silliness is a little fear? What magic does is keep the body going. We sometimes talk about good magic and bad magic: for example, poison is bad magic and a vitamin is good magic. They both make the body real, but one will hurt you, which would become more of a distraction. What is helpful is to realize that, yes, I still believe I am a body, and I believe that taking vitamins and minerals will make my body better, as opposed to not taking them, and as long as I think I am a body, then I might as well do what I think will make my body feel good.

**Q:** But then there is no advancement.

**A:** Yes there is, if you are willing to stop calling yourself dirty names. Forgiving yourself for the use of magic is the advancement. This is the same as doing the workbook and forgiving yourself for forgetting to think of God five times an hour—really forgiving yourself. That is great advancement.

**Q:** When does it really happen?

**A:** When you stop asking the question and stop caring about it. That is a very common trap that students fall into with the Course. You understand intellectually what the Course is teaching, and then you come down hard on yourself instead of saying you are still a little child and are still on the bottom rungs of the ladder. But at least now you know you are a child, which means you know you have to grow. You know that you are on the lower rungs of the ladder, but at least you know there is a ladder and you do not have to be fearful. You do not have to feel that Jesus is mocking you or pushing you up when you are not ready to go up. At least you are aware of what you are doing.

There is a line I quote a great deal that really is the answer. It is in response to the whole issue of suffering. Jesus says that the way out of suffering is to see the problem as it is and not the way you have set it up (T-27.VII.2:2). That is all he says. He does not say anything about making the right choice, or about not dealing with your body. He says that the way out of suffering is to see the problem as it is and not the way you have set it up. The way we have set it up is magic, meaning the body is the problem and the body is the answer—specifically that special relationships are the answers to all of our problems, whether a special relationship with my body or another person's body. That is how we have set it up. The way the problem is, is that my special relationship with the body is the projection of my special relationship with my ego in my mind. That is how the problem is, and that is all you have to do. Simple.

That is what makes this course easy—in the sense that Jesus is not saying that you have to give up your ego. He is saying that you just have to recognize what your ego is doing. That's all. Know the difference between miracles and magic, and recognize that, as a child of magic, you do not want to let it go. At least realize that that is what it is. So, as you are taking your daily dose of vitamins, don't make a big deal about it. Just say, yes, that is what I am doing, because obviously I think I am a body. I got up in the morning, I showered, I got dressed, put makeup on, I came here—I did whatever I did—because obviously I think I am a body. I drive in a car, which is a form of the body, and that has to be taken care of. I have to relate to other bodies in cars. I have to do all that, but at least I realize what it is all about. It is so important to remember to be kind and gentle with yourself. That is your problem.

. . . . . . .

**Q:** Then there is another part in the ego thought system that involves my job: whenever I try to make the world a better place, it feels like it comes with a lot of pain and guilt, compared to just doing what I do during the day. I can feel a difference in how I am thinking.

**A:** Good. Don't judge it and don't try to change anything. When Jesus says, "Seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world" (T-21.in.1:7), what he means by changing your mind is changing your teacher from the ego to the Holy Spirit. Can you imagine the Holy Spirit or Jesus making you feel guilty? No. They would be kind, loving, and sweet, and would just smile with you at your silliness. That is a much better way of understanding what changing your mind means.

What is helpful about it is that when you change teachers, you are changing a whole list of characteristics that go with each teacher. The ego is harsh, judgmental, slippery, deceptive, attacking,   and on and on; and the Holy Spirit and Jesus are kind, gentle, and patient. They do not care about the world, so They do not care about what you do in the world; and They do not care about your choosing guilt, except insofar as it makes you feel bad. Thus, when you change your mind, you are changing teachers, which means you are changing the characteristics of the teacher. You can always know which teacher you have chosen by just watching whether you are being kind, gentle, and patient with yourself, let alone with other people. When you start judging others because they are not getting the Course right or are not doing it right; when you get impatient with people because they don't do something you want them to do, it is because you chose the wrong teacher. That is very helpful information. You will know which teacher you chose by the effects: "By their fruits, you shall know them." The fruits of the ego are always harshness, guilt, anxiety, fear, depression, impatience, and specialness. The fruits of Jesus are always kindness, gentleness, and peace.

Jesus does not care what you do. You really have to understand that. He does not care what you do, and he frankly does not even know what you do, because he knows there is no world, only in a mind. All he knows is love or fear, but since fear is an illusion, all he knows is love. That is why I always say that Jesus cannot count past one—because all he knows is love, light, and peace. That is all he knows. He does not know anything else. Therefore, why should you agonize over something when he is your teacher and he is not agonizing over it? I sometimes say to people on my staff when they get upset about something or when something is not done right, "I'm the boss, I'm not upset, so why are you upset?" Likewise, Jesus is your boss, so why are you upset if he is not upset? If he does not care what happens to this book in the world—and I assure you he does not—then why do you care? All he wants you to do is to take the content of this book—not the words or the form, but the content of the book—and make it your own. That is what he wants.

. . . . . . .

**Q:** I want to address the fact that sometimes spectacularly neat things happen in the world, which my wrong mind calls miracles. For example, I had a problem: I lost my wallet and then I found it. That would be a mild example of a neat thing, and it actually means nothing? Sometimes when these kinds of events happen, I feel I certainly did not have anything to do with this good fortune. It feels good to have spectacularly neat things happen without my knowing how to make such things like that happen.

**A:** I think the problem with that, which is a way of answering your question indirectly, is that you think it makes a difference. When spectacularly good things happen and work out—something that was lost has been found, for example—you think this course is working, and you thank Jesus for it. Unfortunately, then, the real lesson gets lost. The real lesson is, I can be at peace and I can feel the Love of God whether this works out or does not work out; whether my wallet is found or is not found, and I have to go through the whole mess of getting my credit cards, my license, and all those matters fixed up. I can still be at peace. That is the real lesson, which gets lost when your wallet is found, because then, at that point, everything seems wonderful. The ego is so slippery. One could even think that this is a cosmic conspiracy—to have you lose your wallet so you can then find it—so you can think this is wonderful and that God is a magician, when the real lesson is, I could be at peace whether the wallet is found or not; whether or not I get the job; whether or not my favorite team wins the World Series. It does not make any difference. That is the real lesson. This lesson gets lost if you are devastated if the wallet is not found, and you then are exhilarated when it is found. This does not mean you should feel guilty when your wallet is found and you feel good, any more than you ought to feel guilty when you take vitamins. That is just something bodies do. Bodies take care of their bodies in whatever way they think they need help, and bodies will feel good when something they feel is important to their bodies is lost and then found.

**Part V**
**Discussion (cont.)**

**Q:** When the carpet was rolled out, some spectacular things were part of it, and some horrors and other things were also part of it.

**A:** Right. You know, the ego did not make a terrible world, always. There are nice things in the world: lovely sunny days and beautiful spring mornings; beautiful nature scenes; Mozart and Shakespeare; and found wallets. There are many nice things. The problem is that we get attached to the form instead of using the form as a way of getting back to the content.

. . . . . . .

**Q:** I fear feeling good about anything because it is so suspect.

**A:** Yes, right, but that is the same thing as someone taking vitamins. Normal people will feel good when their wallet is found or something nice happens. So be normal. Just be aware of the lesson. That's all.

**Q:** After you do this a while, there is no normal.

**A:** Unfortunately that's true. That is why I am always saying people should be normal, because no one is normal after two weeks of this. I am only kidding about the two weeks of course, but people forget how to be normal, because they forget that they are children of magic. Magic is in their DNA, so of course they are going to like magic, and they are going to prefer white magic to black magic. They like magic that works instead of magic that does not work. So of course we are going to like the good things. The Course does not say you should feel guilty because you like the good things; it simply points out that the good things will not give you the peace of God. Then you become aware—which is what resistance is—that there is a part of you that is not interested in the peace of God. You are interested in the peace of this relationship working, or your wallet being found, or this job working out. And at this particular moment, you are willing to sacrifice the peace of Heaven so that you can get the peace of magic. If you can be aware of that and not judge yourself for it, then you will have learned a lesson.

All you are asked to do, to repeat, is see the problem as it is and not the way you have set it up (T-27.VII.2:2). That is all. One of the ways of understanding what the problem is, is by recognizing your resistance to undoing or solving the problem. Thus, Lesson 79 says, "Let me recognize the problem so it can be solved." That is why we do not recognize the problem—because we do not want it solved. If the problem of the separation—the theme of Lesson 79—is solved, I am gone; I am history; so I do not want to recognize the problem. Instead, I want to recognize all other kinds of problems, which, again, are all different forms of magic. I will feel wonderful when these magical problems are magically solved, whether it is the problem of finding a parking space on a crowded street, or the problem of a bodily disease, or the problem of a diseased bank account. We would much rather deal with those issues than with recognizing the true problem, because if we recognize the true problem—seeing the problem as it is, namely, a decision that my mind made—then at that same moment we are also accepting the solution. Our ego would never let us see the problem as it is, because we want to be separate and stay separate. If we can look at that without judgment, we are automatically choosing the Holy Spirit as our Teacher, and at that moment we can be aware of how ambivalent we are about Him as our Teacher. Then forgiving ourselves for being ambivalent about the Holy Spirit is all we have to do.

Remember, the separation began not with the tiny, mad idea, but when we remembered not to laugh at it and took it seriously instead. Therefore if we can look at our ego—even better, if we can look at our decision for the ego and not take it seriously, we will have undone the ego. Thus, we are not asked to give up taking vitamins; we are asked to give up taking our taking vitamins so seriously, which happens when we judge ourselves for taking them. Likewise, we take the ego seriously when we feel good about something working in the world and then feel guilty about feeling good. That is the problem. Remember, the problem was not the tiny, mad idea; it was taking it seriously. This means the problem is not your special relationship, anxiety, depression, financial or physical situation. The problem is taking any of that seriously, which means giving it power to take away the peace of God. That is what taking it seriously means. Forgiveness means being peaceful at the same moment you are aware of your resistance to doing the workbook and learning this course; being peaceful about holding on to judgments about people, and holding on to grievances of the past and bringing them up every once in a while, whether they are grievances against yourself or other people. The miracle, as well as forgiveness, means that you can look at all of that and not make a big deal about it. Forgiveness is not really about undoing your guilt; it is about looking at it and not taking it seriously. That undoes it.

Let me just read those lines, because they are so crucial:

**(T-27.VIII.6:2-3) Into eternity, where all is one, there crept a tiny, mad idea, at which the Son of God remembered not to laugh. In his forgetting did the thought become a serious idea, and possible of both accomplishment** [the separation happened] **and real effects.**

These effects are the world. That is the problem right there. That is the sum and substance of A Course in Miracles: "In his forgetting to laugh [at the tiny, mad idea] did the thought become a serious idea, and possible of both accomplishment and real effects." That is the principle. Jesus tells us in almost every workbook lesson, certainly in Part I, to understand that principle and apply it very specifically throughout the day. He gives us the nonspecific, abstract principle—the title of the lesson and then the various things he says about it—and at the end of the lesson, he tells us to apply this very specifically to whatever comes up in our day. Thus, we need to watch how we make something serious: a traffic jam; a traffic accident, a relationship; a news program. Then do what Jesus now says:

**(T-27.VIII.6:4-5) Together** [meaning you and Jesus], **we can laugh them both away** [the accomplishment and the real effects; the belief that the separation is real and the effects of that belief: the world and the body and specifically all the things that go on in our everyday life], **and understand that time cannot intrude upon eternity. It is a joke to think that time can come to circumvent eternity, which *means*there is no time.**

Magic says we have to do something about the "accomplishment" and the "real effects." We think we have to do something about our life, about this body, or about this course in the world. That is taking the effects seriously, the world seriously, A Course in Miracles seriously, and above all, taking ourselves seriously. Another word for taking yourself seriously is making yourself special—I now have this special function with this special book: to heal the special world. It all reeks of specialness and takes it all very seriously. This is a very important passage, because this is the problem. Magic takes the tiny, mad idea seriously, as well as its effects. Magic takes the solution to the real effects of the tiny, mad idea seriously. Magic is serious business. The miracle just laughs and smiles sweetly at everything, and says that the devastation that you are looking on is false.

What you want to do, then, is not to do anything differently in your life. Do not change anything in your life. Just smile more at it. Most of you know the beginning of Lesson 155, where Jesus says, "You do not change appearance, though you smile more frequently" (W-pI.155.1:2). That is what it means to be an advanced teacher of God. You do not change how you look, speak, or dress; you do not change your job or your relationships. You do not change anything. You smile more frequently. What does that mean? It means you do not do things so seriously. What does that mean operationally? It means you do not give the world power to take away your peace.

Guilt says I have done something so heinous, so egregious, so gargantuan in its evil that I can never be peaceful again. I have done it: I destroyed Heaven, I murdered God, I crucified His Son. It is awful and abominable! Except that nothing happened—the whole thing is one big joke! "It is a joke to think that time can come to circumvent eternity . . ." It is a joke to think you have the power to destroy Heaven's symphony. That is why Jesus says not one note in Heaven's song is missed  (T-26.V.5:4). Guilt is a very serious concept, which follows upon the equally serious concept of sin. These are so serious, in fact, that we need a magical solution to deal with them, which is the world, which, as we know, is very serious. This world has very serious problems: on a personal level, we have to breathe, eat, and drink regularly. As the world becomes more populated, these needs become potential problems, as there is not enough food or water in the world. There should be enough food in the world, but there is not. There should be enough water in the world, but there is not. These are serious problems. Then there are all the psychological problems and all of the issues of specialness everyone has. Very serious! Bodies were made to be serious. When infants are born and they begin to cry, they are saying, "I am in a very serious situation here." Everything here reeks of seriousness, just as it reeks of specialness—they are the same thing.

Another way of understanding resistance is realizing how resistant we are to stepping back with Jesus and smiling at all of this. The world was made not to have us smile. The world was made but to take itself very seriously. Magic is, again, this maladaptive attempt to solve the serious problem of being in the world, which then in turn is a maladaptive attempt to solve the serious problem of guilt, which is in the mind. What this translates to on a very practical basis is that as you live your life normally, just realize how seriously you take everything, and then forgive yourself for taking it seriously. Then pay attention to the line where Jesus says: "Together, we can laugh them both away . . . ," (T-27.VIII.6:4). A few paragraphs later, he talks about the Holy Spirit and says:

**(T-27.VIII.9:3) He bids you bring each terrible effect to Him** [everything that upsets you in the world] **that you may look together on its foolish cause and laugh with Him a while.**

That is what is meant by bringing it to Him: looking together with Him. You do not pretend it is not there or just blithely "turn it over to Him," as some people say. What you do is look at it with Him, and when you really do this, you will begin to understand—because that is what looking means—why you have chosen this and how much it has cost you to live with this kind of magic. Then you will realize, as Jesus explains in an earlier section, how all of this is just a flimsy veil that cannot conceal the light that lies beyond it (T-18.IX.5). You cannot look at the light without realizing this is a flimsy veil, because to us this is a solid wall of granite and very serious. Solid walls of granite are serious business. But when you really look at it, the wall starts to crumble, and then you realize that what it was hiding is this gentle, loving, sweet light. But you will not know that until you look. The purpose of this course and of the workbook then is to train you to do this each day. As you begin to realize how seriously you take things, Jesus says to "bring each terrible effect to Him [the Holy Spirit]." Then the passage continues:

**(T-27.VIII.9:4) You judge effects, but He has judged their cause.**

He does not look to the effects. Jesus tells us that earlier in the first sentence:

**(T-27.VIII.9:1) In gentle laughter does the Holy Spirit perceive the cause** [the belief in sin], **and looks not to effects.**

"Looks not to effects." And what do we do? We drag the Holy Spirit and Jesus into the world and say, "Look at these effects! Please do something." And They just say sweetly, "What effects? There ain't nuttin' here." (They were brought up in Brooklyn.) "Don't believe what the gospels tell you; there ain't nuttin' here." And we respond, "What do you mean, there ain't nuttin' here? Look at the effects! Look at the people starving! Look at the people dying! Look at me! Look at how pained I am! Look how abused I've been! Look how victimized I am! Look!" And Jesus says, "I am looking, but there is nothing here."

That is how we know why we did not choose him right at the beginning and chose the ego instead—because the ego looked the way *we* wanted to look as a separated individual. We rejoiced in what we saw because that is the kind of Jesus and the kind of God we want: one who looks to the world of effects. We do not want one who does not look at effects and just laughs—not a derisive laugh, obviously, but with a gentle smile that says, "There is nothing here." It is like the little boy in the fairy tale "The Emperor Has No Clothes." We keep trying to convince Jesus to see all these terrible clothes that the emperor has on, all the boils he has on his skin, and the cancer eating away at his organs. And Jesus says, "Not only are there no clothes on the emperor, there is no emperor." The problem is that we look through the body's eyes and interpret what our body's eyes "see" through the brain, and then we think we see something that is not really there. We think about what we see and then conclude that what we think we see is real. That is why such an important theme of this course is that we are not bodies. The single most important line in the workbook, which is repeated more than any other, is: "I am not a body." As we are taught in the Course, perception lies: "Nothing so blinding as perception of form" (T-22.III.6:7). Eyes do not see, brains do not think, ears do not hear. In spite of this teaching, we keep dragging Jesus down to our level, and rather than look through his eyes, we demand that he look through our eyes, see what is not there, and then fix it, which means we want him to be as magically insane as we are. This is why to superimpose the biblical Jesus onto this course will never work. It is not the same fellow. The biblical Jesus has eyes that see and a body that does something about what his eyes see. His body heals other bodies that his eyes see, etc., etc. The Jesus of A Course in Miracles does not do any of that. He does not have eyes. His inward eyes—what is called vision—see beyond the body, which is viewed as simply a shadowy figment of the ego's imagination. Yet that is the serious world that we demand he do something about, which means we want Jesus to become part of our dream.

There is a very important line in "The Gifts of God," the prose poem Helen had taken down that was originally a series of messages meant to help her through a fearful situation. Jesus said to her, "I am not a dream that comes in mockery" (The Gifts of God, p. 121). In other words, "I am not part of your dream, the purpose of which is to mock the reality of God. I am not a body. I am not part of this world. I am not part of this dream. Do not ask me to take your fear away from you. Do not ask me to correct the situation that you think is causing you fear and anxiety. I am not a dream that comes in mockery." The world's Jesus that churches have been built around is a mockery of the truth that we are spirit. That is how God created us. The true Jesus has his home in our mind. He is a symbol of the Love of God that we took with us when we fell asleep, and that reminds us of who we truly are. Yet we demand that Jesus, God, and this course become part of our dream and fix it. That is why this passage at the end of Chapter 27 is so important. The paragraph ends:

**(T-27.VIII.9:7-8) But hear Him say, "My brother, holy Son of God, behold your idle dream** [whatever you are upset about], **in which this could occur." And you will leave the holy instant with your laughter and your brother's joined with His.**

That is the laughter—again, not a derisive, mocking laughter, but a gentle laughter that realizes how silly all of this is. "It is a joke to think that time can come to circumvent eternity." It is a joke to think that anything in this world—and this makes it very practical—has the power to take away the Love and the peace of God in my mind. Yet that is what we do every time we get anxious, depressed, upset, mildly annoyed, impatient, etc. All we have to do is see the problem as it is, not the way we have set it up (T-27.VII.2:2)

**Part VI**
**Discussion (cont.)**

**Q:** I have allergies. I know that if I take something, that is magic; but it is also going to alleviate the symptoms. I know that the allergies are also magic, covering up something. So the important thing it seems would be to find out . . .

**A:** Oh, God, no. That's too much work. No, don't do that. Just take the damn pill to alleviate the symptoms, and just stop with that. Don't analyze or try to delve into the reasons. Remember, "Forgiveness . . . is still, and quietly does nothing. . . . It merely looks, and waits, and judges not" (W-pII.1.4:1,3).

**Q:** The relief I just felt at stopping is profound.

**A:** Yes, don't work at this. Recently I talked about being lazy—that this course is for lazy people. When you work at it, you have the magical idea that working on the ego is going to solve the problem. The ego thrives on your working at it and paying attention to it. So the lesson is to have an allergy and be peaceful about it. Big deal. Why analyze it and scratch beneath the surface and take an earth mover and dredge up stuff? You are allergic to God. That's the issue. Big deal. Everyone is allergic to God. So? That is the bottom line. The lesson is to have an allergy, take whatever magic will relieve the symptoms because it is silly not to, and don't give it another thought. Then be peaceful. If you are working at it, you are not peaceful. Do not work at this course.

Remember the section, "I Need Do Nothing" (T-18.VII). What the ego loves to do is make up nonexistent problems and then get us to devote all of our time, energy, and effort to solving the nonexistent problem. So you have an allergy, which is a nonexistent problem. Now the ego would say: Oh, let's be very good Course in Miracles students, so we will take the magic and that's fine. Now we are going to really get to what this is about, because the symptom is telling me what is going on in my mind. I am going to get to all that. Then you work and work and work, and you keep sneezing your head off, because you are missing the whole point. If it is a nonexistent solution to a nonexistent problem, why are you studying it? What you want to study and understand, without really studying it, is why am I even doing this?

I have not told this story in a long time—it is a wonderful story. It was told to me by my therapy supervisor, a Freudian analyst, when I was in graduate school. He said that when he was in analysis, he was in the sitting area waiting for his appointment, and just before the analyst called him into her office, he took his shoe off. Then he walked into the analyst's office with his shoe off, which is a big thing. The foot is a phallic symbol; remember, this is a Freudian analyst. I do not know how many sessions they spent trying to analyze what this meant, because he had no idea why he did it. Finally, they got to what it was about: it was a very clever unconscious ploy to distract the analyst from getting to whatever it was that he did not want to get to. So they wasted all this time analyzing why he took his shoe off, when the reason he took it off was to distract the analyst from helping him with the real problem.

That is why you have an allergy: to distract your real analyst, Jesus—who does not analyze—from helping you with the real problem. If you try to work at what the meaning of the allergy is, why you have the allergy, why it is happening now instead of yesterday, and all those kind of things, what are you doing? You are taking the tiny, mad idea seriously. Why else would you devote all your energy to it unless you took it seriously? Bingo! The ego got you. That is how you deal with all your problems.

This course is so simple. Jesus says it over and over again. This is simple, yet we make it so complicated. Do not fix your ego, or your symptoms, and do not analyze your symptoms. Be peaceful. If you choose the right teacher, you will be peaceful, whether you have an allergy, cancer, or an automobile accident; whether the sun has just come up or not. It will not make any difference. You will be peaceful. That is the lesson. Observe your ego making up one distraction after another. Do you know the ego's favorite distraction? This book. This is a wonderful distraction. People want to study it, memorize it, learn where everything is, and they want to do the workbook perfectly. They want to devote their lives to it. What life? The worst thing you can do with this course is take it seriously. That does not mean you should not read and study it. It certainly does not mean that you should not practice it, but don't do it seriously. If you do it seriously, the ego has gotten you.

Remember, the problem was not the tiny, mad idea; it was taking it seriously. If you see this course as something that will help you get rid of your ego, you will never get rid of your ego. The purpose of this course is to get you to smile at your ego, not to get rid of your ego. You will never get rid of your ego by trying to get rid of it. That is what makes it real. In The Song of Prayer, Jesus tells us not to make the error real: "*Do not see error*. Do not make it real" (S-2.I.3:3-4). What is the error? The error is the ego. The error is the thought system of the ego, and all of the variations of that thought system. Do not take it seriously. Do not fight against your ego. Look at it, understand why you are holding on to it, but do not do anything about it.

The point of Lesson 79 "Let me recognize the problem so it can be solved" and its companion Lesson 80 "Let me recognize my problems have been solved" is that if my problem has been solved, why do I have to solve it all over again? I would only try to solve the problem of my ego if I believed the problem were not solved. What I have to do is accept the fact that the problem has already been solved. I do not take a problem seriously when it has already been solved. For example, if I have lost my wallet and then my wallet is found, I do not take seriously calling the police, the insurance companies, the credit card companies, etc., because I have found my wallet. Why do I have to bother making all these other phone calls if I have the wallet? The ego has already been undone.

So why do I have to deal with this and worry about it? All I have to look at is why I am still making it real when it is already gone? At the beginning of Chapter 28, Jesus says, "The world was over long ago" (T-28.I.1:6). That is one of the most threatening lines in the Course. If the world were over long ago, I must be over, too, because I am part of the world. As Jesus explains, what keeps the world going in our memory, even though it is gone, is guilt. Guilt tells me I have sinned and the world is the serious consequence of my sin. What I want to do, then, is look at all that and smile. The Holy Spirit does not look to effects: "In gentle laughter does the Holy Spirit perceive the cause, and looks not to effects" (T-27.VIII.9:1). He perceives the cause, which is the belief that I separated from God—the tiny, mad idea taken seriously—and what does He do? He looks at it with "gentle laughter." He does not bother with the effects, the allergies. He does not bother with the cancers, the wars, or the famines. He looks to the cause, smiles gently at it, and then it is gone.

Do not work at your problems or your symptoms. Just ask Jesus to help you smile at them. If you can smile, then the peace of God will come back to you, because the seriousness covered it over. It is very simple. It is much simpler doing this than trying to figure out a sentence with three negatives. That is hard work; you do not have to do that. You read it and you sort of know what it means. You may not know what it really means, but something in you knows. That is enough. Besides, Jesus will say it again and again. If you read this course with your heart, you will understand it, and what you will understand is that you have to look at your ego. We look at it with that "gentle laughter" Jesus speaks of.

This is simple and requires no effort: "I need do nothing." We define the problem in the wrong way and then we are hellbent on solving it, whether it is something specific or more general. We get so serious about this course. That is why I tell people not to make this course their life. Let this course give you the principles by which you live your life, a normal life, the way other people live, but do not make it your life, because if you do, you will be missing the whole point. You will be making it into some kind of special idol and then you will worship it. Then it becomes magic. Use the Course as a way of teaching you not to take your life seriously. That is helpful. It will make things much easier for you.

**VII**
**Discussion (cont.)**

**Q:** I hear what you are saying, but why does the Course talk about the ego, its being so hideous, like the hungry hounds of hell? How can we smile at that? Why didn't he describe the ego as a clown?

**A:** At times he does, actually. There is that wonderful passage where he describes the ego as a mouse in the corner of the universe, screaming out its lungs:

"This is your 'enemy,'—a frightened mouse that would attack the universe. How likely is it that it will succeed? Can it be difficult to disregard its feeble squeaks that tell of its omnipotence, and would drown out the hymn of praise to its Creator that every heart throughout the universe forever sings as one? Which is the stronger? Is it this tiny mouse or everything that God created? You and your brother are not joined together by this mouse, but by the Will of God. And can a mouse betray whom God has joined?" (T-22.V.4:3-9).

The reason he does what you are describing is that he is reflecting the way *we* look at the ego: as a hideous monster and as something absolutely horrific, the greatest criminal in the history of the universe. The ego has destroyed Heaven. That is as bad as you can get. Now, none of this is real; nothing has really happened, but that is what we believe, and so that is what Jesus reflects. As I have said, he lifts the veil so that we can look within and see what we have made. Only then can we look beyond it and realize that what we are looking at is not there.

Let me read something that makes that process very clear. It is in Chapter 11, in the section called "The 'Dynamics' of the Ego":

**(T-11.V.1:5) The "dynamics" of the ego will be our lesson for a while, for we must look first at this to see beyond it, since you have made it real.**

Jesus is now telling us what we have denied. We made the ego into this monstrosity of sin, guilt, and fear that culminates in the wrath of God furiously, maniacally, insanely, and viciously storming into our minds to annihilate us. That is what we believe we did, so he is saying that we must look first at this to see beyond it, since we have made it real.

**(T-11.V.1:6) We will undo this error quietly together, and then look beyond it to the truth.**

Before we can realize that the ego is a pussycat—this little frightened mouse roaring its lungs out at the universe—we have to look at this monstrosity that we made. Only then will we realize it is nothing, and then our eyes will go beyond the seeming granite wall of this monster through the flimsy veil that has no power to conceal the light. Then we will realize that the ego is only a clown. This entire passage, actually, is very important, but these two lines set the whole process of the Course before us. Again:

**(T-11.V.1:5) The "dynamics" of the ego will be our lesson for a while, for we must look first at this to see beyond it . . .**

You cannot get to the light until you first look at the darkness. Jesus told Helen and Bill in a special message—not in the Course—that they cannot get to the love that unites them until they first look at the hate. That is the word he used, hate. He said to Helen and Bill that they must look at their desire to get rid of each other (see Absence from Felicity, p. 297), which is only a slightly euphemistic way of saying they want to murder each other. Thus, you must look at the hate before you get to the love. The reason you have to do that first is that you have made it real. You have made the hate and the guilt real. You have made this thing very serious. He is saying to us, "How can I tell you it is not serious unless you lookat it with me?" That is what we do not want to do, because there is that little voice that whispers, "If I look at the ego, it will destroy me. If I look at the monstrosity that I am, at this awfulness that is going on in my mind, I will be destroyed." That is why this idea of looking is such an important motif in mythology. You do not look at the face of Medusa because you will be turned into stone. You do not look, because if you do, something terrible will happen to you. That is the resistance.

Now, we want to believe something terrible will happen to us. And we believe something terrible will happen because of what we did. But since we are what we did, if we undo what we did—the separation—then we cease to exist. Thus, it is very painful for me to live a life of denial while walking around with this monster inside, but at least there is a me that the monster is walking around inside of. It is not a happy me, but there is a me. If I let the monster out, my ego tells me, it will devour me and I will be no more. What it does not tell me, of course, is that if I let the monster out, I will realize that there is no monster. All that remains is the light of Christ, which is Who I am.

When you look with Jesus, you will end up with that gentle laughter, because you will realize how silly it was to believe this was going on: the entire world, the entire cosmos we made collectively as one Son, and then the individual world, the individual hells that we make for ourselves all are based on the need to have a defense against this monster inside, which really is nothing. That is the "maladaptive solution to a nonexistent problem." When you take your ego, the parts of your life, and your symptoms seriously, you are falling right into the ego's trap, which the ego loves. Just as in my supervisor's example, you then spend hours and hours, and of course for us, lifetimes and millennia, eons, trying to explain what this world is like, why this world is here, what the meaning of life is and so on. What is life? How did it begin? People go on and on with this. They are analyzing why you took your shoe off—and you took your shoe off so you would analyze it, and analyze it, and analyze it more. We are all doing that. We are all walking around with one shoe off, hobbling around our life trying to explain why we are like this. Some people have a brown shoe, others have a blue shoe; some have an open-toed shoe; some have heels; others have loafers; some have slippers; a few have moccasins. We analyze all this, as well as all the differences—in feet, size, styles—and it goes on and on. That is what we do. We analyze everything without realizing the whole thing is made up. That is what magic does. The magic tries to understand, control, predict, explain—everything we are told science is supposed to do—which is all centered on distracting us from what is not there.

. . . . . . .

**Q:** Special hate is the magic that keeps me from looking at this. There is all this fear behind hate, and the fear specifically is what I hate these people for and why I want to murder them. When I am a victim I do not have to look at what I hate them for. Is this but a mirror of what I am accusing myself of, but a different form, maybe?

**A:** Yes. It is always like that. Hate is always an attempt to get rid of one’s self-hatred and put it onto someone else. You know, the line I always quote from Lesson 161, "Hate is specific" (W-pI.161.7:1). There has to be someone you can hate. We have to get rid of our guilt, which is self-hatred. The guilt is the first magic, because guilt is what is going to get us out of the mind, so that we do not have to choose against the ego. We get rid of the guilt and we magically put it onto someone else. Now we do not have to deal with our self-hatred, this monster that lurks within. We just have to deal with all the monsters  "out there"**.** And the whole thing is made up.

**Q:** Why does this take so long?

**A:** It does not take so long, but as long as you agonize over not getting it, you will never get it. You know, the next worse "sin" after taking A Course in Miracles seriously is taking your spirituality and your spiritual path seriously and then agonizing over it. That is the worst thing you do. You might even be thinking you are getting up there in age, and may not have many years left. Remember, though, you do not learn this in your body, which is what the ego wants you to think. That is another magic trick. Bodies are stupid and dumb. You learn this in your mind, and the mind is timeless, time-less. It is not eternal, but there is no time in the mind. Time and space exist only in the world of bodies; they do not exist in the mind, which is the reason this is not learned in the body. The body does not learn. The ego is so slippery!

It is very hard to avoid this kind of thing, because then you begin to think you do not have many years left, and you wish you had found the Course when you were 20. If you think you have trouble understanding it now at your mature age, imagine the trouble you would have had at 20! This has nothing to do with chronology or with linear time. The ego wants you to believe the body is real, and it wants you to believe that learning this course is serious. Any time you take anything seriously, including your spirituality or this course, you will never learn it. The Course never says the Holy Spirit looks with seriousness. He looks with gentle laughter (T-27.VIII.9). Jesus says, "It is a joke to think that time can come to circumvent eternity, which meansthere is no time" (T-27.VIII.6:5), so what are you concerned about? The ego just wants you to take off your shoe, with your wrist watch and calendar in it, hold it up and say there is a problem here. The problem is, why are you wearing your watch in the first place? I don't mean you should physically remove your watch. The concern with time is just another trap.

**Part VIII**
**The Mistake of Taking One’s Spiritual Path Seriously**

Once again, the body is not real. How many times in this course, in all three books, does Jesus say your eyes do not see, your ears do not hear, your brains do not think, your bodies do not feel; they are not born, they do not die, they do not get sick, they do not get well—they do nothing? That also means they do not learn A Course in Miracles. Bodies do not learn.

Think of a puppet. A puppet does not do anything. It cannot think, feel, or act. It is the puppeteer that makes the puppet move, speak, and appear to think. That is all we are. This has nothing to do with your body. The person you think you are, the person you see in the mirror does not study A Course in Miracles. It cannot. What are you reading, studying, or thinking about it with? You think you are doing it with your brain and your eyes, but eyes do not see. The learning occurs in your mind. The Course is just a projection, a symbol in form—a set of symbols that reflect the principle of the Atonement in your mind, which says the separation from God never happened. That is not a symbol, it is a thought. However, as long as we think we are bodies, then this simple thought that undoes the ego has to be expressed in a form that we can relate to. A Course in Miraclesis one such form—there are thousands of others, and Jesus is one such teacher—there are thousands of others.

We have the illusion—the magical belief—that we are learning and studying this course. People get so crazy about this. They get crazy about the words—they think these are Jesus' literal words. How can he have literal words? He cannot speak a word. He does not have a mouth that speaks. He only says one word—"Love"—and that is not a word. This is not a holy book. This is pieces of paper, crushed-up wood, with markings on it. Recall the passage where Jesus gently pokes fun at our love of money, referring to "stacks of green paper strips and piles of metal disks" (W-pI.76.3:2).

Jesus would also make gentle fun of people's worship of this course. This book is a set of symbols that reflect the single content of love, of the Atonement, that is in our mind. When you study this course, you are reflecting a process going on in your mind, where you are turning away from your ego, and the ego's lies of separation, specialness, and sin, etc., and turning toward the Holy Spirit, Whose presence represents peace, love, healing, and the Atonement. All that is nonspecific, abstract, and does not occur in the body or in form, and does not have words. But that is the reality; and that is where the action is. Whatever action you might say there is within the illusion is in the decision-making part of our mind that chooses against the ego or for the ego.

The choice for the Holy Spirit, then, gets reflected by your being a student of this book or any other spirituality. As long as you are a body, you should do what bodies do. Thus, bodies read and study a book that they find important; they practice the book's lessons; and they think about it. But this book will help you realize that you are not your body. Over and over again, you are not your body. Jesus means that very literally. The problem is that most students do not consider the fact that they are thinking about those lines with a brain that cannot think. The same book tells them that they do not think, their eyes cannot see, and their bodies are not real. So what happens? They end up taking their body very seriously as it studies and practices this very serious spiritual text. They also try to get other people to be very serious about it. After all, these are the words of Jesus.

For twenty-one hundred years people have been doing that with a different book. It does not work because it is magic. It is all form instead of the content. People are terrified of the content, so they gravitate to the magic, to the form. They magically think that if they practice this course, read it, study it, write about it, teach it, learn it, and do all these things, it makes a difference. The only place it would make a difference is in their mind, which has nothing to do with what they do in form. Perhaps what they do will flow from the love in their mind, but it is the love in their mind that is important, not what they do. If they are invested in what they do, then you know it is not love in their mind anymore; it is special love. They have a special investment in the special work that they do, the special person they are, teaching these special words to special people in a special way, using a special technique—special this or a special that. Then you know it is not love, because love does not care. Love is only itself. You can try to anthropomorphize love and say it wants something, but all that it really wants is that you rejoin it and be a part of it. Then your body will automatically reflect that love and will do whatever love does. It will say whatever it says, write whatever it writes, do whatever it does, but it will not make any difference to you, because you will know that what is seemingly being done is not what is really being done. What is truly being done is the identification with love in your mind. Everything else is magic.

So do not work hard at this. Do not even work hard at not working hard—that is a trap, too. Do not be serious about not being serious, but do pay attention. When you pay attention with the Holy Spirit, there will be that gentle laughter. Your life will get much easier—maybe not on the level of form, but you will not care about the form anymore. It will be much easier because there will be a quiet peace and a gentleness in you, and there will be a love that will embrace all people without exception. That is how you know that you have chosen the right teacher. If the only word in Jesus' vocabulary is "one," which is equated with love, and you can let that love extend through you and embrace all people as one without exception, then you will know you have chosen him instead of your ego. The Jesus you have chosen is not "a dream that comes in mockery" (The Gifts of God, p. 121). He is not a magical figure, nor a savior. It ends up that he is you, and you are he, because it is all one. You grow in that oneness as you learn not to see people as different or as separate from each other, as better or worse than some. You see everyone as the same. Despite all appearances to the contrary, you will realize everyone is the same.

Each day will be a joy to you because you will see each day as an opportunity of learning, by your reactions, which teacher you have chosen. As Jesus explains in one passage—you will begin to associate being miserable, unhappy, and disquieted with making differences real and choosing the wrong teacher. You begin to associate being really happy, peaceful, calm, gentle, and kind with choosing the right teacher. You will know which teacher you have chosen by just observing your perceptions, your interpretations of people, and your judgments. Then when you begin to recognize these judgments more and more quickly, you will learn to forgive yourself for making the judgments.

Do not work at giving up judgment; just be aware that you are making the judgments and why. If I can establish and justify the differences between you and me as important, then I am saying the separation from God and me is important, too, and is real. Just as the differences between you and me are real, the differences between God and me are real, too. That is why I judge, and that is why I am always trying to push people away.

Whenever I can successfully justify my judgments, I proclaim again, with former President George W. Bush, "Mission accomplished. The war has been won." The war against God has been won. I have defeated the enemy. The problem, however, is that the enemy has not gone away. Just as the war has not gone away in Iraq, it has not gone away in our minds, either. The guilt stays, and there is always another war to be fought. There is always someone else to condemn and judge and hate. There is always another special love out there to conquer, triumph over, and cannibalize. There is always another, because the guilt stays. All that I have to do to have the guilt go away is to look at it. But I need a teacher to redirect my attention from the people out there that I think I hate, or the people I think I love, and bring my attention back to my mind. It is not my special relationship with you that needs healing; it is my special relationship with me that needs healing—the me that has identified with the ego. When I can do that and forgive myself for having chosen the ego, the guilt will go. I do not have to work at it, chip away at it, or keep to a time schedule. It will just go. It is not taking the spiritual path seriously that undoes everything. That is the greatest obstacle, because that is the mistake of remembering not to laugh at the tiny, mad idea.

**Part IX**
**"How Should the Teacher of God Spend His Day?" (M-16)**

Let us look at a passage from "How Should the Teacher of God Spend His Day?" in the teacher's manual (M-16). It is a wonderful section, which deals with everything we have been talking about: form and content, as well as magic. We will start in the middle of the section, paragraph 6.

**(M-16.6:1-2) There is one thought in particular that should be remembered throughout the day. It is a thought of pure joy; a thought of peace, a thought of limitless release, limitless because all things are freed within it.**

Jesus is talking about what the whole point of the workbook is, and that is to learn how to generalize. You are going to take this thought, which we will see in a moment, and then bring all of your concerns throughout the day to that thought. What underlies this is the beginning of the Course, the first principle of miracles: "There is no order of difficulty in miracles" (T-1.I.1:1). What that means is that all problems are the same. All problems are the same. And what that means is that none of them, on the level of form, should be taken seriously, because the form conceals the underlying content, which is always one. The form could be the belief that I am better off being separate from God, or the belief that special love is better than God's Love. Whatever the form, the content is the problem. Everything here is simply a variation, a shadowy fragment of that problem, which means every problem is solved the same way. We bring it to the truth of the Atonement that says: Not only did you not separate from the Love of God, not only did you not destroy Heaven, but you could not have destroyed Heaven. Therefore, why be upset? Not only did you not do it, you could not do it. You never could. The impossible cannot happen, by definition. So, what is the big fuss about?"

Recall the passage about the Holy Spirit not looking to effects (T-27.VIII.9:1). He has judged their cause in gentle laughter, the cause being that we believe we could do the impossible; we believe we did the impossible. But in truth, we cannot. Therefore, it was not done; therefore, there is no guilt; and therefore, there are no effects. That is how everything is healed.

Now that is what this thought is:

**(M-16.6:3-5) You think you made a place of safety for yourself. You think you made a power that can save you from all the fearful things you see in dreams. It is not so.**

That is it. Whenever you get upset during the day, whenever you get serious about something—whether it is in the world at large or in your personal world—just let Jesus say to you, "It is not so." There is a similar line in the text where Jesus describes the insane and warlike nature of the ego and says, "And God thinks otherwise" (T-23.I.2:7). That's it! If God thinks otherwise, what we think is not so. Therefore, why be hot and bothered by it? Why be serious about it? Why try to solve it or fix it? Why try to heal it?

**(M-16.6:5-8) It is not so. Your safety lies not there** [in the ego]. **What you give up is merely the illusion of protecting illusions. And it is this you fear, and only this.**

"What you give up is merely the illusion of protecting illusions." That is what magic is. That is what we have been talking about throughout this class. The world is an illusion protecting the illusion of guilt, which actually comes from the illusion of believing we can be separate from God. That is why nothing here should be taken seriously. It is an illusion protecting an illusion. When you try to change the illusion, when you struggle against the illusion, when you agonize over the illusion, when you hold a calendar up to the illusion, you are obviously making it real. You are giving it power over you. You are giving it power to take the peace of God away from you. That is the mistake and the only mistake.

**(M-16.6:8) And it is this you fear, and only this.**

Why? Because you are the child of the illusion, the magical baby. Take away the magic, and you are no one. That is why we cling to our ego scripts, our defenses, and to our belief in magic. That is why we cling to our past—our past of abuse, victimization, and hurts—because that is what defines us. All the defenses we have erected since the time we were very little in order to protect ourselves and guard against pain, threat, and danger all now become our identity. Then we adopt all kinds of magic to fix the identity.

**Q:** How does this happen without turning into a blissninny?

**A:** The key to not being a blissninny is to look at all this. Remember the passage from "The 'Dynamics' of the Ego" that I read earlier, where Jesus says that we look together at the ego so we can move beyond it (T-11.V.1:5). Blissninnies never look at the ego. Blissninnies would say, "What ego?" If you do this right, you do not say "What ego?" initially. You first look at the ego. That is the difference.

**(M-16.6:8-10) And it is this you fear, and only this** [the fear of giving up the illusion]. **How foolish to be so afraid of nothing! Nothing at all!**

You will not know how foolish it is as long as you think it is something, and you will not know it is not something until you first look at it. Looking takes no effort. It is not hard work. You just look. You do not fix, change, study, or analyze. You just look. "All that is needed is you look upon the problem as it is, and not the way that you have set it up" (T-27.VII.2:2). All you have to know is that you took off your shoe so you would not have to look at the truth. You do not bother worrying about why the shoe is off. All you have to know is that you were born into this world so you would not have to look at the truth, and that all the situations that go on in your life that promote pleasure or bring pain, on all levels, were made so you would not have to look at the truth in your mind.

What that will help you do is not take the specifics of your life or anyone else's life seriously anymore. If everything is the same, then what difference does it make what color it is, what size it is, its magnitude, or the way it looks—whether it is pretty or ugly, sick or well, alive or dead? What difference does it make? Then watch how you want to make it important, how you want to make the differences important. Just watch yourself do it. Don't change it. Don't fix it. Just watch what you are doing. See how quickly you are going to move away from that simple looking and want to do something. The ego always wants to do something. I cannot tell you how many people over the years have complained about this course—that it is not practical. They are going to write a better Course or write a better book that will make the Course more available and easier for people. The Course is very easy. It does not need anything more. I remember Bill Thetford used to say as a joke—but he was somewhat serious—if it is not in the workbook, don't do it. It is all here. You do not need anything else. Everyone wants to do something else, because this is so simple, so threatening. All you have to do is look. You do not have to do anything, and you do not have to practice anything else.

All the workbook exercises, if you really understand the content underneath them, are about looking at your ego and understanding there are two ways of looking. One is the ego's, which is not looking, but judging. The other is the Holy Spirit's, which is looking with a gentle smile. That is all you have to do. People want to make it easier, which means they want to make it more complicated. What could be easier than this: "I need do nothing"? Don't do anything. Don't work at it. Don't be serious about it. Everyone wants to change this book.

So many people feel they can do it better than Jesus, which is what underlies their wanting to change it. This was written down in the 1960s, and the world seems different now. Yes, certainly in form it is different, but the content is the same. This course does not need any changing. People want to change it because that reflects the underlying thought: I can do better than God. I know what love is; God does not know what love is. I know what happiness is; God does not know what happiness is. I can make up a world in which love is triumphant and love is all over, universal and wonderful. I can do better than God. That is one way of understanding what happened in that original instant, which never really happened at all, but we thought it happened. I can do better than God. I can do better than this course. I know what the world needs. Jesus does not. This course is not practical enough. I know. I will rewrite it so people will understand it.

Again, you do not have to understand every single sentence. Take out all the double and triple negative sentences you do not like. All you need is one sentence that you really understand. All you have to do is spend your life on the first principle of miracles, "There is no order of difficulty in miracles." You do not need anything else. If you understand any one sentence in this course perfectly, it would open up everything, so do not complain about how the Course is written. That is not your problem. The problem is what the Course says. You magically hope that if you change the language, if you change this or that, if you translate it into simple English, then it will be different. You will understand it, the world will understand it, and the world will be a better place. The problem underlying all that is that you do know what it says, and it terrifies you, because this course says you are afraid of nothing. "How foolish to be so afraid of nothing! Nothing at all!" The next line is also terrifying:

**(M-16.6:11) Your defenses will not work . . .**

Your life is your defense; your body is your defense; your personality is your defense. Forget about all the special things you do in your life, because now Jesus says: "Your defenses will not work . . ."; and then the second clause:

**(M-16.6:11) . . . but you are not in danger.**

That is not what our ego tells us. Within the confines of our individual lives our ego tells us when we are born that if we do not do something to get our needs met, we will be in danger, and so we have to make our needs known. People have to feel our need and then do something about it to help us. We learn very early how to manipulate and seduce our parents, and then the parental surrogates around us so they will meet our needs; otherwise we will be in danger. Well, we ask, why do infants do that? It is because that is what the ego has programmed in all of us—in the mind, not the brain. We are all programmed to take our lives so seriously, then to demand that people around us take our lives so seriously, and fix things, fix us. The ego does not have to be fixed. The world does not have to be fixed. It just has to be looked at with that gentle smile. That will take you to what has to be fixed or changed, which was deciding for the ego instead of for God. That is the only problem. You do not even have to decide for God. You just look at your decision for the ego and realize how silly it is, how foolish it is to be afraid of nothing, which is all the ego is.

**(M-16.6:11-12) Your defenses will not work, but you are not in danger. You have no need of them.**

What psychologists tell you, which is why this line is in here, is that without defenses you become psychotic. One of the things you learn in providing therapy is that you do not take patients' defenses away. In one sense, of course, that is true, because you do not want to engender fear. However, the underlying principle is that without defenses you would be psychotic, so you need your defenses. That is certainly true in a magical world, but that is not true in reality. Defenses keep you from your safety, because your safety lies in your Identity as God created you. It does not lie in anything in the world or in the body. What you want to do is see how you want to change what this course says and mold it into some likeness you understand, some form of magic that you are comfortable with.

**(M-16.6:13) Recognize this, and they will disappear.**

Recognize that you have no need of your defenses, and they will disappear. Of course, that is what the ego tells us: I am my defenses. Remember, again, why we cling to magic. We are children of magic, the magic of the ego thought system of taking the tiny, mad idea seriously. Therefore, taking everything else seriously is woven into our DNA as separated individuals. The ego actually would agree with this statement: "Recognize this"—that you have no need of your defenses—"and they will disappear." Then the ego says: when your defenses disappear, bye bye to you, too; and then you are gone. That is the fear. The ego never bothers to read us the next line:

**(M-16.6:14) And only then will you accept your real protection.**

As you learn this course, you do not let your defenses go and just go poof into Heaven. You do not lose your self. It is only at the very end of the journey that your self disappears. What disappears as you go along is your anxiety, your anger, your depression, your fear, your phobias, your problems—all of those will disappear. Their place will be taken by your feeling more peaceful, your being kinder, more gentle, more loving, more caring. You will replace the ego's "vision" of separate interests with the Holy Spirit's vision of shared interests. You will still have your self. You will still recognize your shape in the mirror every morning. But as each day goes on, the face that you see in the morning will be a happier one, and will have a gentler, kinder smile. It is only at the very end that everything disappears.

Again, this is not something you have to work at. Just watch what you are doing, day in and day out, and watch the effects of choosing your ego. The pain will come from realizing that it hurts you to make judgments, hold on to grievances, be angry, and judge people all the time. That is what will motivate you to let it go, and you will let it go when you are good and ready. Remember, since Jesus exists in a timeless state, he is not holding a stopwatch to you and he is not marking days off on a calendar. No one is urging you or pushing you. This is a very gentle, loving process in which no one will be hurt or lose.

**Part X**
**Concluding Discussion**

**Q:** When you talk about the pain of recognizing that you are doing this unto yourself, it sometimes feels not so easy to laugh and step outside of that.

**A:** That's true. I think what the ego then would have you do is exactly what you are describing, and then that becomes serious, because pain is very serious. Physical and/or emotional pain is very serious. That is something you want to look at also, as it happens, and just see it as something you want to watch. Then, in the end, the most happy fact of all is that we are doing this to ourselves. That is what gives us the power. As long as we think that the world is doing it to us, or the body is doing it to us, or someone else is doing it to us, there is no hope, because there are very few things we can control in this world. However, realizing that we are doing this to ourselves, as the text says: "The secret of salvation is but this: that you are doing this unto yourself" (T-27.VIII.10:1), is the real end of pain, and that is the real hope. Feeling bad, stupid, or guilty about that is exactly what the ego wants. We are taking that seriously. Everything the ego does has as its purpose to take itself seriously.

Again, the reason the ego made the body and a psyche to feel pain, which is the reflection of guilt, which is painful, is that these become tremendous distractions. We all know that when we are in pain, the last thing in the world we want to think of is God. All we want is relief from the pain. That is the underlying and ultimate purpose, because pain is serious. We localize the seriousness of pain to the body, when the real pain is the guilt over the belief that we destroyed Heaven, and that is in our mind. Our physical or psychological pain is magic, and then we take magic to reduce the pain. Then, of course, whatever magic we take in itself becomes a problem, so afterward we have to take magic against the magic, against the magic. We have to take a pill to counteract the effects of the other pill we took.

The ego is clever, devious, and destructive. That is what it is, so do whatever you have to do to alleviate your pain, but also try at the same time to step back and just see where all this fits. It is a comfort to understand that everyone is in the same boat, because everyone is in pain in this world, but in different forms. Everyone is in pain. Being in this world is painful. We are all stuck. That is one very helpful way of understanding the shared interests that we all have. We all have the same need and the same goal to escape from the pain of being here. At some point we have to understand that the "here" that we are in is not the body. The "here" that is the real cause of the pain is in the ego thought system, what the early parts of the text call our wrong mind. That is where the pain is.

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**Q:** But the pain that we are talking about we want to have. We are in the exact place that we want to be. Where I am getting a bit confused is, since I want this pain, why do I take something to kill it off?

**A:** You see, but you are not. What you are doing is taking magic to alleviate the magical symptom without the magical cause, the decision to be an ego. You alleviate one symptom and the ego says, "Oh, isn't that great!" and, bingo, you have another symptom. Then you have to take magic for that, and the ego tells you that magic works, because you had this pain yesterday and you took this pill or did this, and it worked. Now you have a different pain today or perhaps the same pain, so magic again will help.

**Q:** And if I do not take it, I suffer and become a martyr.

**A:** Right. And that is magic, too. Everything we do here is magic. The ego is magic. The ego makes up its thought system of guilt and fear to get us to leave the mind voluntarily. It is all magical, its purpose being to solve the problem of the decision maker, which to the ego is a serious problem, because the decision maker has the power to undo the ego, simply by changing its mind. The ego makes up this magical story filled with all kinds of magical figures—a ghost story. It is the mother of ghost stories, because God ends up as the real villain. Then we flee from that into a world, which is a magical way of avoiding the magic of guilt, which is a magical way of avoiding the power of our minds to change. Then we are in this world and we have one problem after another, with one form of magic after another, whether it is the magic of medicine, money, relationships, food, or whatever. It is always something. It works temporarily, which to the ego is great, because that reinforces the idea that magic helps. This means we have a real problem here in the body, and magic will come to the rescue. If magic never worked, then we might be very tempted to go back to the miracle. However, since magic works—at least we think it works—then we keep doing it.

**Q:** But the magic of the pill and the alleviation of the pain, which is the other layer, can at least get me back to looking.

**A:** Yes. Obviously, once you are in pain you want to undo the distraction; but it is helpful to see the greater context in which all this happens, and realize, as I was saying earlier, that the real lesson is: I can be at peace; my mind can be peaceful even if I am in pain. That is the lesson we want to learn. Part of that is that we can take a pill to alleviate the pain and still be peaceful. We always want to move as quickly as we can back to the mind, because that is where the issue is.

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**Q:** What is the process when there is psychological pain?

**A:** It is the same thing. Do whatever you need to do to alleviate your psychological and/or physical pain, because it is cruel not to. But do not be taken in. Remember, what you believe is the pain is not the pain, and what you believe alleviates the pain does not really alleviate the pain. Try to see it within a larger context. You really have to be kind to yourself, though, because bodies were made to feel pain. We have a very sophisticated sensory apparatus. Our psyches were made to feel pain. Obviously, we all believe that we are bodies, so of course we are going to feel pain. We have an investment in seeing the world as real. Pain is one of the things that make the world very real, and so is pleasure. That makes the world real, which makes the underlying thought real, which is made real because we take it seriously, and therefore we take the world seriously. It is a trap and there is no way out of it unless we recognize that this is not happening "out here." It is a projection of a decision we make in our mind.

There is no way we can awaken from the dream from within the dream. We cannot awaken from the dream by fighting it or defeating the bad guys, whoever the bad guys or bad things are. We cannot awaken from the dream by making it a better dream—by bringing A Course in Miracles to the world, as an example. We can awaken from the dream only by opening our eyes, and we learn how to open our eyes by continually asking Jesus to help us look with him at the world we made. He will teach us that the world is a projection of the inner world we made. Only then can we change our minds about it.

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**Q:** Could you say, then, that everything we do here is a defense? Even getting dressed in the morning?

**A:** Yes. Everything we do here is a defense—unless we do it in our right minds; but otherwise, everything here is a defense. You would also have to say that breathing is a defense, and eating and drinking, grooming one's self, etc., are defenses. However, if you see your body as a classroom in which you are going to learn ultimately that you are not a body, then taking care of your body is really allowing yourself to learn the lessons in the classroom you think you are in. Now, the real classroom is in the mind, but we do not know about our minds; we just know about our bodies. Thus, the right-minded correction for the ego's interpretation of the body as a prison is to see it as a classroom. Part of the classroom is—just as when you are a student in a college and attend a class—you get dressed every morning, groom yourself, and do what normal bodies do. It is the same thing here. You have to keep this body alive. As long as we think we are in a body and want to use it for a right-minded purpose, we must take care of the body. As we make our way up the ladder, which means as we learn our lessons more and more, which in turn means undoing our guilt more and more, and smiling more at our ego, we are beginning to understand that the classroom is not in the body at all, because the body does not learn. The classroom is in our mind.

We begin to understand that what we are studying—A Course in Miracles—has nothing to do with this book, and that the real learning is occurring in the mind. That is what will help to wean us from our dependence on the book as the book, and the Course as the spiritual path. We will begin to understand that what we are studying, practicing, and applying is really a projection of what is going on in our mind. It is that relationship with the symbol we call Jesus, who represents the purity of our right mind and the Love of God in our right mind that is our teacher. That is where the learning is going on. That is what will help us become less and less dependent on the book. We will be very grateful for this course, and for this book, because it will have gotten us to the point where we will not need it anymore—at least not the way we used to, because we are now internalizing what we are learning. At the very end, we realize that we are the book, because we are the love that is the source of the book. That happens at the very top of the ladder. That is the real world.