**The Metaphysics of Separation and Forgiveness**

Excerpts from the Workshop held at the
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**Part I**

*A Course in Miracles* shares many of the teachings found in the spiritualities and religions of the world, both the traditional as well as some of the New Age ones. For example, the Course teaches us that God is a loving Creator, a loving Father, not a hateful or a vengeful one. The Course teaches us that we should be loving and peaceful rather than filled with judgment and anger. The Course teaches that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were expressions of love rather than of judgment, punishment, and sacrifice. And the Course teaches, as we know, that forgiveness should be our central focus.

These teachings do not make the Course unique. What does make the Course unique among all of the religions and spiritualities of the world, both western and eastern, is the way that it integrates its non-dualistic metaphysics with a very practical and sophisticated psychology. Forgiveness is the concept which unifies and integrates the metaphysical teaching that the world is an illusion not created by God—and therefore there is nothing to forgive—with very sound, practical guidelines for how we should demonstrate and practice forgiveness in our daily lives.

One of the major purposes of this workshop is to present an overall summary of the Course's teachings, specifically addressing how the metaphysics of *A Course in Miracles* becomes the foundation for everything it teaches about forgiveness. The key idea in the metaphysics is that the world is an illusion and was made as a hiding place so that God would never find us, an idea which can seem rather abstract and removed from our experience, but nonetheless, again, is the foundation for everything the Course teaches about forgiveness. Focusing on the metaphysics will also allow us to understand in more depth why it is extremely important, as we work with the material, not to fall into the trap of thinking that the Holy Spirit is our magical helper Who will take care of all of our problems and needs, from the "minor" ones of getting parking spaces, to the "major" ones of healing us of cancer or AIDS, or bringing world peace, or whatever. It is one of the essential teachings of the Course that the purpose of the Holy Spirit or Jesus is to remind us of the choice that we have to make. And that understanding is not possible without first understanding the metaphysical framework of the Course.

We will be reviewing and summarizing the Course's basic teachings in order to see how this important thread runs through everything that the Course teaches. I will be presenting a basic visual framework for the teachings (**see chart**). So let us start right at the beginning—and of course the word Beginning here will be spelled with a capital B because we are speaking of Heaven where there is no time—there is no beginning, no end, and no time intervals.

In the Beginning there is God and His Son, which the Course refers to as Christ. Perhaps the most important characteristic of Heaven is the idea that God and Christ are perfectly one. It is Their oneness that characterizes the state of Heaven. There is a definition in the text where Jesus says that Heaven is the "awareness of perfect Oneness" (T-18.VI.1:6). When the Course says that God and Christ are one, and that the state of Heaven is perfect oneness or perfect unity, Jesus means that very literally.

Let me address this a little more, because it will be important later as we see what forgiveness really means. To say that God and Christ are perfectly one is to say that there is no separated consciousness in God that can observe Himself in relationship to His creation, just as there is no separated consciousness in Christ that can observe Himself or experience Himself in relationship to His Creator. To speak of two beings, God and Christ, is a formulation we are comfortable with in a world of duality, or a world of separation. They are not terms, however, that would ever be used in Heaven. Again, God would not identify Himself as God the Creator and Source, and Christ would not identify Himself as the Effect of God or His creation.

Another term that could be used to characterize Heaven is that it is *a state of perfect non-duality*. There are not two Beings Who interact with each other. An important line in the workbook says, "Nowhere does the Father end, the Son begin as something separate from Him" (W-pI.132.12:4). And there is another passage in Lesson 169 that speaks about this state of oneness:

Oneness is simply the idea God is. And in His Being, He encompasses all things. No mind holds anything but Him. We say "God is," and then we cease to speak, for in that knowledge words are meaningless. There are no lips to speak them, and no part of mind sufficiently distinct to feel that it is now aware of something not itself (W-pI.169.5:1-5).

That is that same idea—there is no place where the Father ends and the Son begins. There is no separated consciousness in the Son that could observe Himself in relationship to His Creator.

The passage continues:

It has united with its Source. And like its Source Itself, it merely is. We cannot speak nor write nor even think of this at all (W-pI.169.5:6–6:1).

This is why we are not going to spend much time on this, and why in the Course Jesus does not spend much time on it. Obviously, it is impossible for our separated minds and brains to conceive of a reality in which there is absolutely no separation. Again, there is no place where God ends and His Son begins. So the state of Heaven is that of perfect unity. Another way of characterizing this is to say that the Mind of God and the Mind of Christ are totally one. Later on, it will be clearer why it is so important to understand that the state of Heaven is absolute oneness and perfect unity.

The Course then explains that the impossible seemed to happen. In reality it never happened at all, but it *seemed* to happen. That is when the "tiny, mad idea" (T-27.VIII.6:2) of being separated from God seemed to enter into the mind of God's Son. We will characterize that by a little vertical line going down (**see chart**)—this is the "tiny, mad idea." It is the idea that the Son somehow now is separate from His Father—he has a mind, a will, a self that is separate and independent from his Creator. So he can now observe himself and experience himself in relationship to God.

Before this tiny, mad idea (which the Course also talks about as the beginning of the dream) seemed to arise, such a phenomenon was impossible, because the Son did not have a mind or a self that was distinct or separate from His Creator. But once the dream began—a dream of separation—the Son all of a sudden began to observe himself as someone separate from his Father. And that gave rise to what we can refer to as the split mind (with a lower case "m" to distinguish it from the Mind of God and Christ).

When the Son falls asleep and begins to experience himself as a separated being, he has a mind which now appears to coexist with the Mind of God or the Mind of Christ. That mind has two parts, or what the Course often refers to as two voices that speak for it. One is what the Course refers to as the ego, and the other is the Holy Spirit. Both of these voices can basically be understood as reactions to the tiny, mad idea. In reality there are not two people taking up residence in the Son's mind. We are speaking in the realm of metaphor or myth. So we speak about the Son's mind having these two parts—and shortly we will add a third part—and speak of these two parts as if they are two seemingly separated beings—the ego and the Holy Spirit. In the Course, the ego is always spoken of as an "it," while the Holy Spirit is always spoken of as a person, as a "He." But the ego is nonetheless described in anthropomorphic terms—it plots, it seeks vengeance, it seems to love, it hates, it deceives, etc.

So, in the Son's mind there are two thoughts or two reactions to the tiny, mad idea. The ego thought is that the tiny, mad idea has actually happened. In fact, one way of defining the ego is to say that it is the belief that the Son has really separated himself from his Creator. Thus, the ego is nothing more than a thought or a belief that exists in the separated Son's mind—the thought that the separation has actually occurred. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is the thought that the separation never happened—that the "tiny, mad idea" is meant to be understood literally: the idea is "tiny" because it was inconsequential and had absolutely no effect, and it is "mad" because it is insane. It is insane to think that a part of God, a part of the All, a part of total unity could somehow split off and, all of a sudden, be outside everything—that there could be a reality beyond totality, something beyond infinity, a power beyond omnipotence. Near the end of the text, a section called "The Anti-Christ" (T-29.VIII) discusses this specifically. Anti-Christ is another term for the ego. The anti-Christ is the thought that there is a power beyond omnipotence, a place beyond infinity, etc. And so the Holy Spirit is the thought that says, "This could never happen."

There is also another way of understanding Who or What the Holy Spirit is. When the Son fell asleep and began his dream, he carried into the dream the memory of who he truly is as God's Son, the memory of God's Love. That memory, which now rests within his separated mind within the dream, is what we refer to as the Holy Spirit. And that memory is what links the dream to the reality. This is similar to memories in our everyday experience—when we have a memory in the present, it is a link to something that happened in the past. That is what the word *memory* means.

Whatever happened in the past—whether it happened five minutes ago, yesterday, or thirty years ago—suddenly becomes very real and present to me. If it is an unpleasant memory, I will experience anger, anxiety, fear, or depression. If it is a pleasant memory, I will experience happiness and joy right now, as if the past were present. That memory is what links the past and the present. The Holy Spirit works the same way. He links the Son's present experience of believing he is in a dream with his reality, which is not really in the past in a temporal sense. This link then connects him to the God Whom he never truly left. That is why the Course teaches that the Holy Spirit undid the original error the instant that it seemed to occur, because when the Son fell asleep he had that memory with him. And that memory is what proves to him that he never separated himself from God, that it was simply a dream.

In addition to these two thoughts in the Son's mind, there is a third part of the split mind—which we will characterize by this little blue dot (**see chart**). This is the part of the mind that must choose between these two thoughts or voices. I will call the blue dot the *decision maker.* Although the Course never uses the term in this context, it really is what the Course means by *Son of God*, the Son of God in his separated state. In the Course, Jesus uses the term *Son of God* in two ways: either to refer to Christ and our Identity as Christ as spirit, or to denote the Son within the dream.

While, again, Jesus never uses the term *decision maker*, over and over again in the Course he is asking us to choose again—to choose between the ego's thought system and the Holy Spirit's thought system, between the crucifixion and the resurrection, between a grievance and a miracle. The part of our minds that he is continually appealing to in the Course, when he addresses us as "you," is this part that chooses. And so I have just given it a name for convenience.

Thus basically we are talking about three essential parts of the split mind: (1) the part of the mind that contains the thought that the separation is real; (2) the part of the mind that contains the thought that the separation never occurred (what the Course refers to as the Atonement principle); and (3) the part of the mind that must decide which thought system is true. As the Course repeatedly explains, the Son has no other choice—he must choose between the ego and the Holy Spirit. There are no other alternatives. And he must choose one of them. He cannot choose both of them simultaneously. And he cannot choose neither of them. He must choose either the ego or the Holy Spirit. The decision maker is never neutral.

Here is where the story becomes interesting, because the ego now is confronted by a real threat. What if the Son of God listens to the Voice of the Holy Spirit and recognizes that all of this is a dream, that it never really happened, that there is no separation? What happens then? The Son awakens from his dream, and the ego is gone, the dream is gone. So in order to sustain itself and keep its existence going, the ego must somehow convince the Son of God—the decision maker—that he needs to choose the ego instead of the Holy Spirit. If we can understand this point and always keep it in mind, it will make everything else that we talk about in this workshop—and certainly everything else in the Course—very, very clear. It will help us to understand why we always do the insane things that we do. For example, we may have been students of this Course for ten or fifteen years and we will still hold on to grievances. We still choose to forget about Jesus and identify with the ego when the going gets tough, and continue to do all the maladaptive things we do.

So the ego devises a plan—a plot in which it hopes to ensnare the Son and convince him that the Holy Spirit is not to be trusted, not to be believed, and certainly not to be identified with. To do this, the ego makes up a story. It is a totally made-up story, with no semblance to reality, no basis in reality at all. The ego's story rests on three basic thoughts: sin, guilt, and fear. Now keep in mind again that the purpose of this story is to convince the Son to turn his back on the Holy Spirit and to identify with the ego. As long as the Son does that, the ego remains intact. And remember, the ego is simply a thought or a belief in a self that asserts that the separation from God is real—that the reality is the separated Son of God. This of course is in contrast to the Holy Spirit's "story" that says that the Self of the Son is the Self of Christ, Who has never left His Father.

So the purpose of the ego's story is to have the Son end up not trusting the Holy Spirit and turning his back on Him. So the ego tells the Son this story:

You have done a very bad thing in separating from your Creator and your Source. Here was this perfectly loving Father Who was only love, and He shared that love with you totally. He withheld nothing from you—what was the Father's was the Son's. The Father was perfect Love, so the Son was perfect Love. But you turned your back on this Love, and told God in no uncertain terms that you wanted something more than the everything He gave you. You told God that His Love was not enough, that His Heaven was not enough.

We could embroider on the story in many ways: the Son could tell the Father that Heaven was boring, that he wanted a little excitement. Or the Son could be jealous and want some of what God had. These are all just different symbols or metaphors to try to explain in terms we can understand, what seemed to happen at the moment of separation, and what seemed to evolve into the whole dream of this world. But the bottom line is that the ego gives this act a name, and it is a dirty name, a dirty word: *sin*. The ego tells the Son:

You have done a sinful thing to your Father. He was all-loving, and He gave you everything. You had everything—everything He had, you had. You were totally one with Him. But you turned your back on Him and said, "This is not enough. I want something more." That was not very nice of you. In fact it is sinful. And because of your sin, you should feel guilty.

This is the beginning of all guilt, which we could translate freely as self-hatred. We end up hating ourselves because of the terrible sin that we believe we have committed. So guilt automatically follows from sin and is, basically, the psychological equivalent of the thought of sin. The ego tells the Son of God, "You have sinned against your Father, and you deserve to feel guilty because of what you have done." This inevitably leads to the third member of this unholy trinity. The Son is now told:

Because of what you did, because you stole from Heaven, and because you in effect destroyed God by proclaiming yourself God by saying "I am self-created instead of created. I am on my own, and I am independent and separate from my Creator," God is very angry. When He recovered from the shock of what you had done—that you had stolen from Him—He realized what had happened. And now all He wants is vengeance.

The ego then tells the Son of God,

You know that Holy Spirit Who is present in your mind, Who seems to speak only of the Love of God, and tells you that nothing happened and that God does not even know that you are gone? Don't believe a word He says. He is not to be trusted, because God sent Him out. He is God's general, Whom God dispatched into your mind to trap you and capture you and bring you back to Heaven so you can be punished as you deserve to be—which of course means your annihilation.

This is the beginning of fear—where the "fear of God" comes from. Those who have worked with the Course for a while know that the fourth and final obstacle to peace is the fear of God (T-19.IV.D). This is its origin. It begins with the idea that we have sinned against God, that our guilt is overwhelming because of what we have done, and that our guilt demands that we be punished. The ego warns:

And this Presence of God's Love in your mind is God's punishing agent. In fact, that is why God dispatched Him into your dream—so that He could capture you and bring you back. If you believe His lie, you will be seduced by Him, and will you ever be sorry!

That is the ego's story. It means that the Love of God, which the Holy Spirit represents as the memory of God's Love in our dream, turns into something else—it turns into the wrath of God. The ego's story has very nicely made the real God nonexistent, because the Love of God is now turned into its opposite—the Love of God is now seen to be filled with wrath and vengeance. And the Son is the object of this wrath. This of course is where all the dreadful "wrath of God" passages in both the Old and the New Testaments come from. They have nothing to do with the loving God Who created us, Whom we never left. But they have *everything* to do with the ego's story.

Basically, with some exceptions of course, the story and the view of God that we get in the Bible is this god of the ego. It really is a god of specialness—God is nice when you give Him what He wants, but when you do not, He becomes insane and He kills. That is the ego god, which is what the wrath of God represents. And that is what the ego has made of the Holy Spirit as well. So that is the choice that the decision maker—the Son of God—is confronted with. Either he believes the Holy Spirit, representing the principle of the Atonement, Who tells him that nothing has happened, that the Son never left his Father, and this is only a bad dream. Or he believes the ego's story that the separation did indeed happen—the Son did steal "the family jewels," he did steal all the power of God, and God is hopping mad and has sent out his henchman, the Holy Spirit, to find the Son and bring him back. That is the ego's story.

Now for reasons which can never be explained, the Son of God made the wrong choice. He turned towards the ego and in effect turned his back on the Holy Spirit.

**Part II**

Where we are in the story is that the ego has made up its tale of sin, guilt, and fear, with the specific purpose of keeping the Son of God away from the Holy Spirit. This is the central thing to understand, because this motivation will help account for everything that happens from this point on. Another point to make here—which I will come back to later—is that the ego's fear is really not of the Holy Spirit. The ego does not know about the Holy Spirit. There is no way that a thought of separation could understand a thought of unity. There is no way that a thought of jealousy, competition, judgment, and hatred—all of the ego—could ever understand a thought of love. The ego is afraid and it does understand that there is a power greater than itself. That power is the power of the Son's mind to choose. The ego's real fear is not of the Love of God, because it does not know about the Love of God. Its real fear is of the decision maker. Its real fear is that the Son will change his mind, turning away from the ego and turning back to the Holy Spirit, at which point the ego disappears.

It is extremely important to understand that the ego's goal is not really to bury the Holy Spirit, but to bury the Son's mind, because the mind really is the great threat. The Son's mind can choose against the ego, and choose the Love of God, which means the end of the ego. If the ego can somehow make the Son mindless, then the ego is home free. And it never has to worry about God or the Holy Spirit, however it conceives of them. The ego's real fear, again, is of the power of the Son's mind to choose. We will see now how the ego takes its plan a few steps further to achieve its ultimate goal—rendering the Son mindless so he will never change his mind and will always remain fully identified with the ego. When the Son of God chooses the ego and turns his back on the Holy Spirit, he not only chooses the ego thought system, he becomes the ego thought system. This is extremely important.

When the Son of God becomes identified with the ego thought system of sin, guilt and fear, he identifies himself as sinful, guilty, and fearful. The workbook says at one point, "You think you are the home of evil, darkness and sin" (W-pI.93.1:1). We all believe that, because we listen to the voice of the ego. Again it is not only that we believe in a thought system of sin, guilt, and fear, we become that thought system—it becomes our self. And the ego wants us never to break that association and identification. The Son could break it only if he says, "You know, there's something wrong with what I chose. I want to make another choice." That is the ego's fear.

So the ego takes its plan one step further. It already has made the Son afraid of the Holy Spirit, believing there is a place within his mind that represents annihilation and strikes terror in his heart. That place is where the Holy Spirit dwells. So by virtue of its sin, guilt, and fear story—that the Son has bought hook, line, and sinker—the ego has convinced the Son that his mind is now a battleground where he is at war with his Father and the Holy Spirit. At the ego's urging, thus, the Son has turned his back on the Holy Spirit and identified with the ego (represented by the vertical solid line on the [**chart**](https://facim.org/online-learning-aids/excerpt-series/separation-and-forgiveness/separation-and-forgiveness-part-ii/javascript%3Avoid%280%29), separating the ego from the Holy Spirit). So the Son now does not even know about the Holy Spirit. The Love of God has been turned into its opposite, with the Son believing that he is at war with God and in mortal danger.

There is a very important passage in the manual that speaks about this insanity and describes it with the words, "Kill or be killed" (M-17.7:11). That becomes the reigning principle of the Son of God's mind. If he remains within this battleground, it is either him or God. And obviously, he does not stand much of a chance, because this is God Whom we are talking about, this raging, insane "beast" Who has been hurt by this puny little nothing who has stolen God's treasure, His power. We can see the arrogance of the ego thought system in believing all this. But that is what sin, guilt, and fear are telling us—God is on the rampage, and if He ever catches up with the Son, which is inevitable, the Son is finished. That is the insanity of the ego system. This is all described in more sophisticated terms in the section, "The Laws of Chaos," in Chapter 23 in the text.

The Son of God now says to the ego—and basically he no longer is really separate from the ego—with tremendous terror in his heart:

Help! I need a defense. I need something that will protect me from God's wrath and vengeance, which mean my certain death. I need a defense against this insane God Who I know is in my mind, because my guilt tells me I must be punished for sinning against Him. I sinned against Him because I believe that the separation from God is real—it has actually occurred and it is going to have terrible consequences.

Buried in the Son's mind is the Holy Spirit's simple Atonement principle that says that nothing happened. Another way to say it is that the separation is just a silly dream, with no consequences, no effects—nothing has happened. In a lovely phrase in the text, Jesus says that "not one note in Heaven's song was missed" (T-26.V.5:4). That is why it is a "tiny, mad idea." God does not even know about it. Nothing happened. But the Holy Spirit's thought of correction has stayed buried in our minds, and instead we have the ego's thought system of sin, guilt, and fear that inevitably leads to the need for a defense. The Son of God needs something with which to protect himself against the wrath of God. And no defense will work as long as he remains on the battleground. He is totally out-armed and out-manned. He does not stand a chance.

Therefore the ego says to him, "I have another plan, which is absolutely wonderful. It's God-proof, and there's no way this plan can fail: We are going to leave the battleground and make a hiding place. I guarantee you God will never, ever find us." And so the Son of God, of course, is overjoyed and says, "When do we leave? My bags are packed. Let's go." The ego and the Son again join, fusing into one. They leave the battleground for a hiding place where God will never find them. The ego tells the Son, "The Holy Spirit exists only in your mind, and so if we leave the mind, we're home free." Psychologically the term that we use to denote the process of taking something from within the mind and placing it outside the mind is projection. That something is the ego, which is nothing more than the thought of separation fused with the Son of God. This thought, this self, is placed outside the mind, invariably giving rise to a world of separation. And this is the Course's explanation of how the entire physical world came into existence. When Jesus in the Course speaks about the world—the world of perception, the world of form, the world of separation—he is talking about the entire physical universe, and not just planet Earth, or our own cities, or our bodies. He is talking about the entire universe—the cosmos and all the galaxies that we are not even aware of. All this is the world of separation.

So the world is a hiding place to which the ego, together with the Son of God, has displaced or transported itself. As the Course says near the end of the workbook, "This world was made as an attack on God. ... [it] was meant to be a place where God could enter not" (W-pII.3.2:1,4). Once the ego makes the world to hide in, it does two more things for its crowning achievement. Keep in mind that the ego's purpose is very, very simple—it wants to make the Son of God mindless. The ego's fear, again, is that if the Son ever remembers that he has a mind that can choose, he will recognize that he has chosen wrongly. He would realize that the ego is really the one telling the lie, and the Holy Spirit is telling the truth. And then the Son would surely change his mind.

Since the ego's purpose is to make us mindless so we cannot change our minds, it makes up the world in which we hide. And then, as I just said, it does two more things to ensure that the Son of God will forever more—at least within the ego's system—remain without his mind. First, once the ego has projected itself from the mind—that is, once the thought of separation is placed outside the mind, resulting in a world of separation—the ego causes a veil to fall across the Son's mind so that he forgets where the world came from. We can call this the veil of forgetfulness, which basically is the dynamic of denial or repression. The Son of God denies what has happened—he forgets. He forgets that all this began in his mind where he had two choices—to listen to the voice of the ego or to the Voice of the Holy Spirit. He forgets that he chose to listen to the ego, to follow everything the ego said, and that he ended up in the world out of terror. He was afraid that if he remained within his mind, God would destroy him.

So the veil of denial causes the Son of God to forget. Then—and this is the ego's final, crowning achievement—the ego makes the body. The ego tells the Son of God, "Your home is not your mind. Your home is your body." And the ego makes the brain, which becomes the computer of the body. (It seems that the brain governs our functioning in the world.) The Son of God finds himself in a body, forgets where he came from, thinks he was made by other bodies, thinks that he came into a world that was here before him, and has no memory at all of anything that we have been talking about. He has no memory at all about these two alternatives in his mind—either the Holy Spirit's Atonement principle or the ego's story of sin, guilt, and fear. He has no idea of a choice. All he knows is that he is in a body. He does not remember that the body he is in is nothing more than a projection. This is a body that believes in sin, guilt, and fear—the basic experience of everyone in the world. We believe that we are separated and that we are terrible sinners. We do not need the Roman Catholic Church or the Protestant Church or the Jewish faith or anything else to tell us that we are sinful, because we carry that thought within us. We all feel overwhelmed with guilt and self-hatred, and we all are afraid of being punished because of our sins.

These thoughts and feelings are not a result of what we think goes on in our lives here. Rather, we have simply transplanted what is in the ego mind into the world and into our individual experience. It is similar to sitting in a movie theater: Everything on the screen in front of us that seems so very real, with the power to bring up so many reactions, both positive and negative, is nothing more than the projection of what is on the film running through the film projector in the projection booth. It is impossible there be anything on the film that does not show up on the screen. And it is impossible there be anything on the screen that does not come from the film.

That parallels exactly what I am describing here. As the Course repeatedly tells us, there is nothing outside us. It is impossible that anything that we feel here not come from our own minds. The problem however is we do not know about the mind, because it seemingly has been forever blocked from us by the veil of forgetfulness. All that we know is that we feel terrible here in our bodies. We spend years in analysis or psychotherapy, with the therapist telling us that we are the products of all the terrible things that happened to us as children. Of course we are upset! Look at all the terrible things happening to us as adults. All of our explanations for our distress are based on the sin, guilt, and fear that we believe occur within our bodies or brains. When psychologists talk about the mind, they are not talking about this mind. They are talking about the brain.
. . . . . . .

The Course is telling us that we are not upset because of what is happening with the body. We are upset because we chose the ego instead of the Holy Spirit. Our identification with the body, then, is basically the end of the ego's story and the ego's plot. The ego has achieved its purpose by making us mindless, because from ever on now, we experience all kinds of problems, both on an individual level and in terms of a collective or societal level. And all our problems are focused on the body, one way or another, psychologically or physically. When we talk about the body, it includes our physical self as well as our personality, our psychological self. Both are what the Course means by "the body." Since we experience all of our problems here in the world and in the body, this is where we look for the solutions or the answers. It seems there is nowhere else to look. We do not know about the mind, because of the veil of forgetfulness ([**see chart**](https://facim.org/online-learning-aids/excerpt-series/separation-and-forgiveness/separation-and-forgiveness-part-ii/javascript%3Avoid%280%29)). Helen woke up one morning and heard herself saying to herself as she was getting up, "Never underestimate the power of denial." That later came out in the Course as, "Do not underestimate the power of the ego's belief in it [guilt]" (T-5.V.2:11). This veil of forgetfulness is the most powerful and the most primitive of all our defenses, and it works perfectly. If I am not aware that I have a mind, how could I possibly change it? That is the purpose of the world: to distract us from where the problem really is. Another term we could use to describe the world is that it is adistraction device.

Very briefly now—because we will come back to it later—the miracle, to round out this whole picture, simply reverses what the ego has done. That is why it is extremely important not to confuse the Course's meaning of a miracle with anything external. The miracle simply takes our attention, which has wandered from our minds and ensconced itself in the body, and brings it back to the decision maker. So the miracle simply reminds us that we do indeed have a choice. The miracle says my problem is not outside me in the body—it is not what the world is doing to me, it is not what my body is doing to me, it is not what my family has done to me. My problem is what I have done to me. The one mistake that we all made as one Son, right at the beginning, is the same mistake we make all the time, over and over again. We simply made the wrong choice. We dropped the hand of the Holy Spirit, and we took the hand of the ego. The miracle simply brings us back to our minds, so we can make another choice.

One extremely important definition of the miracle is that "the miracle is the first step in giving back to cause the function of causation" (T-28.II.9:3). Cause is the mind, the world is the effect. The ego tells us that the world causes our distress. In reality, the world is simply the effect of a decision made in our minds, which is the cause. The miracle restores to the mind, restores to cause, its function of being the causative agent. Once I know that I have a choice—the basic and primary purpose of the Course is to help us know this—I can choose between my ego's thought system with itsevaluation of me, and the Holy Spirit's thought system with His evaluation of me. That is a very simple way of understanding what the Course is about—it is simply a way of reminding us that indeed we have a choice.

To preview something I will discuss later: The role of Jesus or the Holy Spirit is to be that place within our minds, that beacon of light, that lighthouse that simply shines out its presence as the constant reminder. As a lighthouse shines out its presence for the boats that are lost or trapped, Their role is to remind us that we do indeed have another choice. That is why over and over again in the Course, Jesus says, "Choose again."

**Part III**

I want to go back over the development of the ego system, but now specifically in terms of the notion of separation. Another term we can use for separation is splitting off. Basically, everything that I have spoken about can be summarized as a sequence of four splits or four separations. Understanding this will make it easier to grasp why the Course speaks about forgiveness as it does, and why Jesus talks so much about joining.

The **first split**, or the first separation, happens when the tiny, mad idea seems to occur—the one Mind seems now to coexist with a separate mind. So the first split, the first separation, is mind from Mind. In the Beginning—the capital "B" helps us realize that we are talking about a timeless, eternal state—there was only the totally unified Mind of God and Mind of Christ. Once the dream seemed to occur, there appeared to be two minds, the Mind and the mind—the Mind of Christ and the split mind.

The **second split**, or the second separation, follows next, as the split mind itself separates and splits. There are now two parts to the split mind—the part where the ego is and the part where the Holy Spirit is. With the first split, the mind seems to exist as separate and split off from the Mind, which seems to establish the mind as being on its own. It has an existence independent of the Christ Mind, and obviously independent of God. That mind then splits into two—what the Course refers to as the wrong mind and the right mind. The wrong mind holds the ego thought of separation, and the right mind the Holy Spirit's Atonement thought—that the separation never happened.

I am speaking of this as if it occurs in a sequence, just as earlier when I described the development of the ego system, it seemed to suggest a sequence. In reality none of this happens in a sequence—it does not happen across an interval of time or space. What we are seeing here—and it will become even clearer as we continue—is that the ego's separation thought follows the same law as God's Thought does. The thoughts are totally different, but the principle is the same. God's Love simply extends Itself. Since God's Love is perfectly unified, whole, and eternal, It continues to extend Itself and becomes Itself. This makes no sense to us here, but the principle is that love simply extends itself.

The ego thought follows the same law of the mind—extension (God, the Holy Spirit) or projection (ego). Since the ego thought is separation, division, and fragmentation, that is what it continues to extend or project. All I am doing now is describing that process. So the first separation is the mind from the Mind. The second separation occurs within the mind that now appears to be two. As we saw earlier, the Son of God as the decision maker then joins with the ego, believing that he has become that self—sinful, guilty, and deserving to be punished. And that justifies his fear.

This is when the **third split** happens. After mind first splits from Mind, and then splits itself between the wrong mind and the right mind, the wrong mind itself now splits. This is the third split, and it is extremely important that this be understood. We have this sinful, separated self, which I will denote by a vertical line ([**see chart**](https://facim.org/online-learning-aids/excerpt-series/separation-and-forgiveness/separation-and-forgiveness-part-iii/javascript%3Avoid%280%29)). This is the Son of God who experiences himself as the home of sin and guilt, as a sinful, guilty creature. The ego tells the Son that he can escape from the sin and guilt by splitting himself in two. So the self splits in two: it splits to the wrath of God. This is the birth of fear. The Son begins as sinful and guilty, and then splits himself off, projecting the guilt so there now seems to be a separate being. Where before there was only one self in the ego mind—the sinful, guilty self—there are now two selves. They constitute the cast of characters on the battleground: the sinful, guilty Son who now believes he is at war with his wrathful, insane Father. In reality, of course, there is no wrathful, insane Father—the whole thing is made up. It is a split-off part of the Son's mind that appears to be outside it.

Basically that is projection. We simply take something within us, put it outside us, and then forget what we have done. And what seems to be outside us is, in reality, still part of our minds. Effect and cause always remain united—ideas never leave their source. We think there is something outside us, but it is simply a projection of what is inside us. This guilty, sinful self of the Son has split into two, and the part of the self that he hated, the sin and guilt, now appear to be outside the self, placed onto a being that has suddenly come into existence. The guilt is no longer within the Son. It is projected onto the Father. And now this Father—this wrathful, vengeful God—is "the heavy." He is the One Who attacks, the One Who is filled with vengeance. He has become the victimizer.

In reality, the Son believes he is the victimizer, because he believes he has victimized God—God is really the victim. That is why the Son is sinful and feels guilty. But once he projects the sin and guilt out, God becomes the heavy. God becomes the victimizer and the Son is now the innocent victim. That is what is found in the great western myth of Adam and Eve. At the end of this biblical story, God is the heavy. He is the One Who punishes. And it is a hell of a punishment! He destroys His own children. He tells them that they will die, and then banishes them from His Kingdom. Obviously, a loving God does not act like that.

This marvelous story from the Bible describes in graphic terms the ego thought system and how it arose. And God ends up having all the attributes of the sinful, guilty Son. Of course He has all the attributes of the sinful, guilty Son, because He is the sinful, guilty Son. He is simply a split-off part of the Son's mind—the third split. There is no battleground in the Son's mind. The whole thing is made up. And on another level, there is no sinful, guilty Son in the first place. That is made up as well.

What started out as a single self has now split into two, just as a cell divides through mitosis. The ego has split off itself, and the Son forgets what he split off. One of the characteristics of this whole procession of splitting is that, because of the veil of denial ([**see chart**](https://facim.org/online-learning-aids/excerpt-series/separation-and-forgiveness/separation-and-forgiveness-part-iii/javascript%3Avoid%280%29)), once the Son splits off, he forgets where he split off from. When the mind comes into existence, it forgets what the Mind of Christ and the Mind of God is like. All it knows is that it is on its own. That is the first split. Once the split mind splits and the Son chooses the ego, the Son forgets about the Holy Spirit. What the Son splits off to he identifies with, and what he splits off from he forgets.

With the third split, the Son of God forgets that he is sinful and guilty, because the sin and the guilt rest on what is placed outside him. The sin and the guilt now rest on the Father Who is seen as the avenger, the attacker, the victimizer. What is split off to is remembered, and what is split off from is forgotten. It is important to keep in mind that there is no one outside the Son. The God Who is seen as external, Who has the power to hurt and victimize, literally does not exist. He is simply a split-off part of the Son's mind. Likewise, the sinful, guilty self does not exist—the whole thing is made up. The ego just keeps splitting. What it splits off from is made up, and what it splits off to is made up. But what the Son splits off to becomes more frightening than what he split off from—each successive step brings with it a new fear that requires a new defense, which involves another split.

This leads us to the **fourth and final split**.

Once the ego has split itself into two, with the innocent-victim Son now at the mercy of the victimizing Father—this victimizing God Who will destroy him—all the Son can do is run for his life. So now comes the fourth and final split, where the mind splits from itself, making a body split off from the mind. At this split we find an incredible explosion, which is a metaphor for the one Son of God fragmenting into billions and trillions and zillions of pieces. There is no number large enough to describe and encompass what this split has entailed. Let us look at a part of the text that deals with this, the section called **"The Substitute Reality" (T-18.I.4:1-3)**. This section is probably the best account in the Course of the origin of the world. The last section in this chapter, "The Two Worlds," is probably the best account in the Course of the purpose of the world: to conceal our guilt.

**You who believe that God is fear made but one substitution**.

When we believe that God is fear, which is what the ego has told us, we have made only one substitution—there is only one mistake. We substituted the ego's thought system for the Holy Spirit's. There was only one mistake, one substitution.

**It has taken many forms, because it was the substitution of illusion for truth; of fragmentation for wholeness. It** [that substitution] **has become so splintered and subdivided and divided again, over and over, that it is now almost impossible to perceive it once was one, and still is what it was**.

This very important passage is describing the fourth and final split, when the mind splits off from itself and becomes a body, fragmenting over and over again. It is as if all hell breaks loose. That one ego thought, that one Son of God, fragments into billions and billions of pieces. The resulting world becomes a very effective hiding place, distraction device, and smokescreen, because we end up with what the Hindus refer to as the "world of multiplicity." This world becomes so incredibly complicated, so incredibly vast, that it is almost impossible to conceive that the error "once was one and still is what it was"—nothing has ever changed. There was only one mistake—the Son of God turned to the ego instead of the Holy Spirit. That mistake is carried within every fragmented mind and every fragmented body—each of us carries within us that one mistake.

We each also carry within us the ability to make another choice. Basically, the Course views the split mind, especially as we experience it here, as holographic, even though Jesus never uses that term. And one of the principle characteristics of a hologram is that the whole is found in every part. Any part or fragment of a holographic picture contains the whole of it. You can reproduce a whole picture from just a fragment. Within each tiny fragment that each of us represents is contained the whole of the ego's thought system, the Holy Spirit's thought system, and the decision maker's ability to choose one or the other. But it all comes from this process of splitting off, where we continually split off one from the other.

Let me run through the splits one more time. First the mind splits off from the Mind, and forgets where it came from. Then the mind splits into two—the decision maker chooses the ego, or the wrong-mind part, and forgets the Holy Spirit, or the right-mind part. The wrong mind, which consists of sin and guilt, then splits off into two—a sinful, guilty Son and a wrathful Father. But the wrathful Father has taken on the attributes of the sinful, guilty Son, so that the Son forgets that he really is guilty. What was one now seems to be two, except what seems to be the other being, is simply a split-off part of the one self. Finally, these two selves split off and the seeming split-off reality of a battleground in our minds now takes form outside us. And the entire world appears to be a battleground. But if the battleground in my mind is a conflict between two beings that are really one being, seemingly split into two, that means that the battleground I experience here in the world, where I am the victim and you are the victimizer, simply involves split-off parts of my one self.

When Jesus in the Course says that your brother is your self, he means that literally. There are many passages in the Course that should be taken metaphorically, such as Jesus saying that God is lonely without His children (T-2.III.5:11), that He weeps for them (T-5.VII.4:5), and that God gave us the Holy Spirit in response to the separation (e.g., T-5.II.2:5). These are metaphors, not to be taken literally. But when Jesus says that your brother is a part of you, he means that literally. And the splits explain why this is so. The vengeful, wrathful God Who we believe is the victimizer, making us His victim, is really a split-off part of ourselves. That thought is buried in the mind under the veil of denial. We project that thought out and make up a world. The victim-victimizer split in the mind—the battleground—is seen outside the mind. But the principle is exactly the same, because nothing has changed. My victimized body, which is outside my mind, seems prey to your victimizing body, which is also outside my mind. But they are both parts of my one self.

So basically, forgiveness means I really am forgiving what never happened: we never split off. When the Course talks about healing relationships—changing a special relationship to a holy relationship with my special partner—it means that the special person in whom I have invested so much hate or so much need is literally a split-off part of myself. I am literally joining with myself—not the self that has a name—because the person I identify with as the victim, and the person I identify as the victimizer are really split-off parts of a larger self. The whole message and the whole plan of the Course—to whatever extent we can speak of a plan, because Jesus does not have a plan as such—is that everyone that we split off from we gradually reunite with. That is the circle of Atonement. And that is why the Course has such an emphasis on joining with each other. And that joining is not on a physical level—it is not joining between one person and another. It is remembering that we are really parts of a larger self. As I rejoin with you—which means I no longer see you as the victimizer—I must be doing the same thing with God, because I am really running away from the split-off God I made up. The whole dynamic of projecting my guilt onto another being whom I literally made up—that I think is God—gets repressed and is then seen outside.

Let us turn to a passage in the "The Dreamer of the Dream" in Chapter 27 of the text that makes this strikingly clear. At the beginning of paragraph fifteen Jesus says, "Dream softly of your sinless brother, who unites with you in holy innocence." Then at the end he says, "He [your brother] represents his Father [your brother represents God], Whom you see as offering both life and death to you" (T-27.VII.15:1,7). He seems to be offering both life and death to me because I have a split mind. My ego tells me that God is offering me death; the Holy Spirit says that God is offering me life. Since this is the split in my mind that I have made real in the world, then anyone that I am relating to will carry the same qualities that I projected onto God. I am re-enacting the splitting off that we all did when we split off our sinful, guilty self and put it onto God. You then become the representation of God for me. Since I see God as representing life or death, that is also how I see you. And then Jesus says, "Brother, He gives but life." God only gives life—this is just another statement of the Atonement principle. And he continues, "Yet what you see as gifts your brother offers represent the gifts you dream your Father gives to you" (T-27.VII.16:1-2).

With this passage we can begin to see the connection I mentioned right at the beginning between the Course's metaphysics and its very practical emphasis on how we live with each other—it is all the same thing. We can begin to understand why forgiveness is so central in the Course, and why it is so important for us to recognize our hatred and all the specialness that we feel for each other. They are a reflection of the original hatred we feel towards God. And I do not have to get in touch with that original hatred. I only have to recognize that in feeling victimized by you, I am re-enacting the third split in which I felt I was being victimized by God. If I can heal my relationship with you, which simply means changing my mind (we will come back to this shortly), then I am really healing my relationship with God, because it is the same problem.

Everything is the same problem. No matter how often I split it off and fragment it, the substitution remains what it always was. The immense significance of that passage from "The Substitute Reality" is that it shows so clearly that the problem always remains the same. It remains one, despite its seeming appearance as billions and billions of relationships, each with its own problems. There is only one relationship. It begins with my seeing myself as guilty because I listened to the ego instead of the Holy Spirit. That guilt is so horrible that I split it off so I see it outside me. But that in turn becomes horrible because it means I will be killed by God. So I split that off and make believe it never happened. I make up a world and people it with billions of bodies. And I re-enact with every single fragment the same problem I have with God: I see myself as an innocent victim of what someone else has done. The form of the relationship is either special hate or special love, but it always ends up the same.

I do not have to go back in my mind to my relationship with God. I simply have to be able to choose to let Jesus help me look at the split. (We will discuss this further a little later.) Jesus helps me understand that the problem is not you. The problem is that I have split off something in myself that I do not want to look at. So I see it in you. If I can say your seeming sin has no effect on me, I am in effect saying that you do not exist outside me. And so I am really beginning to rejoin with myself.

Some of the ancient Gnostic texts have Jesus speak about how he is "regaining himself," or "rejoining with himself," how he is "collecting all the fragments and reuniting them within himself." Those were very brilliant ways of describing this process through which we will all end up as one self. The Course's concept of the Second Coming is that all of the seemingly separated fragments of the Sonship will reunite as one Son.

The process begins wherever I am, whenever I feel there is someone outside me who can either hurt me or save me—it does not matter, it is the same mistake. I want to learn that whatever I am seeing outside is a split-off part of myself. By forgiving you and joining with you, I am really joining with myself.

**Part IV**

It may be helpful to contrast the Course's process of healing our relationship with God with a process reflecting other spiritual teachings. Thus, people often say that they experience feeling much closer to God through nature—by just walking in the woods on a beautiful day, for example.

The problem, a typical and a common one, is hard to escape because we have such an idealized view of nature. We can understand God having nothing to do with New York City, or subway trains, or taxicabs, or AIDS, or bombs, or those kinds of things. But the beautiful woods, a beautiful tree, a spectacular sunset, this gorgeous lake—He obviously had to have had something to do with them, we think.

Yet they are all just part of the ego's smokescreen. We know something is of the ego if it is outside us. This is a helpful way always to tell if it is of the ego. What happens if there is a forest fire, and the beautiful woods are gone? What if I break both my legs and cannot walk out in the woods? Or it is a terrible day, the temperature is below freezing, it is snowing and sleeting, and I cannot go? Does that mean that I cannot have the peace of God? I know it is a special relationship when I say my inner peace, my feeling happy, depends on something outside me being a certain way.

That does not mean people should feel guilty because they enjoy a nice walk in the woods, any more than we here at the Foundation should feel guilty because this is such a pretty place. But when the pretty place becomes a substitute for the Love of God or the Love of the Holy Spirit in our minds, then we know we have made a mistake. If we have it and it is external, we are going to be afraid that at some point it will be taken from us. And then we will feel that God, or the terrible world, is depriving us of it. Similarly, we may think that civilization is despoiling this beautiful property, and we are the victims of it—we will always end up as the victim in the victim-victimizer dynamic.

The real value of walking in the beautiful woods is that it would remind us that the Love of God is within us. So a beautiful nature scene would be a symbol for us of the Love of God, as it obviously is for many people. There is nothing wrong with that, so long as we do not confuse the symbol for the reality, for the reason I have just given. What happens if for some reason we cannot go out into the beautiful woods? Does that mean we are not going to have the Love of God within us? But since we live in a world of symbols—in fact we ourselves are a symbol, a symbol of this thought system—we need other symbols which represent that other choice for us. A Course in Miracles can be such a symbol—we could substitute the Course for a walk in the beautiful woods. This could take the form of a thought such as "I feel terrible and depressed, but if I read my daily workbook lesson, I feel wonderful."

Now, I can get caught in a specialness trap with this as well, unless I see the workbook or the Course, the way I see the walk in the woods: as simply a reminder that there is a place in my mind where I can choose. The workbook lesson or the walk in the woods simply becomes a way of getting back within myself, so that I can feel the peace of God regardless of where I am or what I am doing.

To the ego, the world is a prison in which we are stuck as a way of hiding from God's wrath. But in the end God is going to get us anyway, because everybody dies. There is no way out. And before God gets me, you are going to get me, because everybody in the world is out to steal from me what I believe, unconsciously, I stole from them.

To the Holy Spirit, the world is a classroom. The same relationships, the same objects of specialness that my ego used to convince me that I do not have a mind and that this world is a prison and a battleground, can now help me realize that the world is really a mirror that reflects back to me the conflict in my mind I did not even know existed. So feeling peaceful when I am walking in the woods could be the reminder that there is another thought system in my mind—not just a thought system of anger, depression, guilt, anxiety, and conflict, but one of love and peace. The mistake is when I associate the love and peace with the beautiful woods. Simply seeing the beautiful woods as a symbol reminding me of what is within me makes the woods "holy." And that can make Auschwitz holy as well—the external form does not matter. What makes something holy is that it serves the purpose of being a classroom that allows the miracle to lead me back to my mind where I can now make a different choice.

Whether I decide to take a walk in the woods or to read a workbook lesson, the choice to remember God's Love has already been made. Then I take a walk in the woods or do a lesson and see the reminder. In other words, I would not be open to feeling so happy and peaceful walking in the woods or reading the workbook lessons had I not first made the decision to join with the Holy Spirit or Jesus. The external then becomes a symbol or reflection of that decision. They seem to occur in a sequence, but in reality they do not. It all happens at once.

I began this workshop by saying that what makes the Course so unique as a spiritual path—which is not to say it is the only one or the best one, it is just unique—is that it integrates this overriding view of the relationship between the ego and God, between the world and God, with very specific practical guidelines for living in the world. And that is what I want to speak about now.

It does not really matter how we got here. What does matter is that we all experience ourselves as being here. The value of understanding the metaphysics is simply that it makes clear to us why we keep doing the same silly things over and over again. It makes clear why we have so much trouble really knowing Who God is and having an image of God that is clear and clean of all the projections that the world—and we—have put onto Him. It explains that what we believe we did to God is what we believe we are doing to each other. So we do not have to know why we are here or how we got here. All we have to know is that we are here, and that there are two purposes for our being here. One is the ego's, and one is the Holy Spirit's.

The ego's purpose is to continually establish that victimization is real, which is the principle of the world. It is "one or the other," "kill or be killed," "me or you." This world is a battleground. And it is a war that I know I will inevitably lose, because everybody loses—everybody dies. The ego interprets death as the punishment that God gives us because of what we did. We all believe deep down in the recesses of our minds that we stole life from God, that we took that life and hid it in our bodies. The body is the microcosm of the world as a hiding place. Therefore, when God finally finds us out, as He inevitably will, He will steal back from us what we stole from Him. When God takes back that life, life goes out of us. And that is what we call death.

The ego's interpretation of death is exactly what is found in the Adam and Eve story. And the whole concept of an after-life exists so that not only can God punish me here by killing me, but then He can punish me after death by kicking me out of Heaven. The Adam and Eve myth is remarkable as a description of the ego thought system: God not only kills me in the body, but then He pursues me throughout hell. He keeps me out of His Kingdom. The ego views this world as a prison from which we will never escape. And as long as we are here, we desperately try to hold off the inevitable. That is why people in some new-age circles like to think that their bodies could become immortal. It is their way of trying to stave off the wrath of God. I am not necessarily saying that that is not a helpful idea, if that is what works for you—but that is not what the Course teaches. The Course would ask why anybody would want to stay here.

The world then is a prison in which we try to get as many measly crumbs as we can. And when we get the crumbs, somebody else has to be without them. It is always dog-eat-dog—one or the other. That is why our guilt is so strong. And specialness—which we have not gone into in any depth because that would take much more time—is the Course's term for the ego's dynamic of trying to steal from another what I feel is rightfully mine. If it is an outright theft, that is specialhate—I just attack and kill you. I do whatever I have to do to get what I want. If the theft is subtle and manipulative, then it is special love—I seem to love you, but I steal from you nonetheless. I only seem to be loving and kind so that you will not attack me back. You are doing to me what I am doing to you is the ego's version of the marriage made in heaven. Both of us are making special love bargains. And the altar—which is the Course's metaphor for where we act out our relationship in our minds—drips with blood.

There is no way out of the ego's version of the world, because no matter how successful we may be here, our egos tell us we stole what we have, and in the end God will take it back. And obviously, since we die, we know the ego is right. So there is no hope. That is why the Course says the ego's thought system is foolproof (T-5.VI.10:6)—once one is caught in it, there is no way out. But this thought system is not God-proof, because there is another way of looking at it. Here is where the nuts and bolts of the Course come in. As students of the Course, we are asked to become increasingly aware of our ego thought system so that we learn not to be afraid of it. The problem right at the beginning, when the ego told us its story about how sinful and guilt-ridden we were, was that we listened when the ego said, "This is so awful, you must never, ever look at it again."

In one place in the Course, Jesus speaks about our having made a bargain with the ego in which we swore never to look at it (T-19.IV.D.3:3). So the ego paints this terrible picture in our minds—we have stolen from God, killed Him, and He is going to kill us in return. And then the ego says, "It's so terrible. Never, ever look at this again. Just blot it from your memory. We will project it out into the world so that we will see the same scenario, but now it will be outside us—it won't be us!"

Jesus tells us that we have to be aware that that is what we have done. The problem is not only that we chose the ego, but that we vowed we would never look at it. And so he helps us, through the Course, to begin the process of looking. I want to begin to look at my ego and all my specialness thoughts—all of the ways I want to cannibalize you in the name of love, all of the ways I want to kill you in the name of righteous indignation, all of the ways I want to feel like a victim at somebody else's expense. And I exult at the idea of others being victims so I can blame the one who made them suffer—whether it is a political figure, an international figure, or a member of my own family. When I can look at all this without being guilty, without being afraid of it, and without judging myself for it, then I will be beginning the process of undoing the ego.

Looking at my ego without judgment means that I am not looking with my ego, because the ego cannot but look with judgment. That is what the ego is—a judgmental thought. If I can look at my ego in action, with all of its ugliness and murderousness, and then realize that this is not who I am, even though it may be what I am choosing to identify with at this moment, then I must be looking with Jesus instead of my ego. My ego would never look without judgment, and if I am looking without judgment, I cannot be looking with my ego. This is the beginning of the end of the ego thought system, because I am following the miracle line (**see chart**). I am going back to the choice point in my mind and making another choice. I am saying that I do not have to be afraid of my ego thought system any more. The value of the Course is that it reminds us of that choice. Jesus spends a great deal of time describing the ego thought system, not because it is real, not because it is true, not because it has done anything, but because *we* believe it is real. We believe the ego has accomplished the impossible. Therefore, we have to go back and look at it and finally realize that it is nothing. It is not a roaring lion—it is a frightened mouse (T-21.VII.3:11). It is a little piece of nothing, a "tiny, mad idea."

When I can look at my ego with the love of Jesus next to me, I am beginning the process of changing my mind and going back to the Holy Spirit. That is forgiveness. The value of the world as a classroom is that it shows me what I never knew existed in my mind. I see all the horror around me, and I see how I make it real, either by identifying with it or being repulsed by it. I see all the horror in me—all the ways that specialness has ruled my life. And I realize as I see it outside me—whether it is in your body or in my body—that it is a projection of what is inside me. Once I know it is inside me, I can look at it with Jesus next to me, and I do not have to judge it. I do not have to change my ego. I do not have to fight against it, I do not have to feel guilty about it. I simply have to look at it without judgment.

Looking at the ego for an instant without judgment is what the Course means by the holy instant. In the holy instant I am joining with the Holy Spirit or Jesus. The mistake of seeing the role of Jesus or the Holy Spirit as solving problems in the world is that it makes them as insane as we are. We made up problems in the world—whether we are talking about not having a parking space for my car or having AIDS does not matter—to distract us from the problem we had in our minds when we made the wrong choice. To see Jesus doing things in the world is to drag him down into the illusion. And that is what the Course means by bringing truth to the illusion instead of illusion to the truth (e.g., T-17.I.5). We are asked to see that our investment in the problem in the world is a displacement from our fear of looking at the real problem in our minds.

The role of Jesus is to be a place of love and light in our minds—which really is a place of forgiveness—to whom we go when we are tempted to see the problem or the solution outside us. Asking Jesus for help, in Course terms, really means looking with him at our own specialness, without being afraid of it and without guilt. As we do that more and more, we begin to learn that the ego has no effect. No matter how terrible we think our ego is, it has not come between us and the Love of God. "Not one note in Heaven's song was missed" (T-26.V.5:4). This purple line (**see chart**), which we could take to represent eternity, has not been broken at all. So the role of the Holy Spirit is to help us look at our egos without judgment, and that is forgiveness.

**Part V**
**Conclusion**

Let me close by reading from a passage in the workbook, "What is forgiveness?" (W-pII.1.1,4-5). It is a summary of everything that we have talked about. The idea is that I do not have to do anything. I do not have to change what is going on in the world. I do not have to change what is going on in my mind. I only have to look without judgment, with Jesus or the Holy Spirit next to me, at what I believe I did, realizing what it is costing me. By learning that I do not have to feel guilty because of all my judgmental thoughts, I am really learning that I do not have to feel guilty because of what I did to God.

One final point before we read this—it is really important that I do not get caught in the ego's attempt to have me have my cake and eat it, in a bad sense. For I may be tempted to say to myself, "I have all these negative, judgmental, specialness thoughts, and I am watching them as I am hitting you over the head." But that is not what the Course means by looking. When I look at my ego with Jesus, I also realize the cost—my holding on to these judgments is literally costing me the peace of God. I may be perfectly willing at this point to pay that price, but at least I know that is what I am doing. Looking does not only mean that I look with Jesus while I kill off everybody in my mind—it means I am also aware of what killing off everybody is costing me. And if I really am aware of what it is costing me, I will stop killing people in my mind.

Let us read those paragraphs now.

Forgiveness recognizes what you thought your brother did to you has not occurred. It does not pardon sins and make them real. It sees there was no sin. And in that view are all your sins forgiven. What is sin, except a false idea about God's Son? Forgiveness merely sees its falsity, and therefore lets it go. What then is free to take its place is now the Will of God.

Forgiveness is still, and quietly does nothing. It offends no aspect of reality, nor seeks to twist it to appearances it likes. It merely looks, and waits, and judges not. He who would not forgive must judge, for he must justify his failure to forgive. But he who would forgive himself must learn to welcome truth exactly as it is.

Do nothing, then, and let forgiveness show you what to do, through Him Who is your Guide, your Savior and Protector, strong in hope, and certain of your ultimate success. He has forgiven you already, for such is His function, given Him by God. Now must you share His function, and forgive whom He has saved, whose sinlessness He sees, and whom He honors as the Son of God.

**Questions and Discussions Excerpted from the Workshop**

**Q:** I'm interested in knowing what fires up the ego. But isn't that the same as asking how the tiny, mad idea could have happened?

**K:** Not quite, this question has an answer. The decision maker fires up the ego. The ego itself has no power at all, as powerful as it seems—and certainly we all experience great power here in terms of our thoughts and feelings. But what gives the ego thought system that power is not the ego itself. It's the power of the mind to choose—that's its source of power.

**Q:** But there's still a part of me that doesn't believe that I made all this up and that I chose it.

**K:** Right. I think that what you are pointing to is the idea that, as we study this, we begin to see that this is a perfectly dreadful thought system. And the dreadful things that go on in this world in which we live show us the enormity of the hatred and insanity inside us. It is very difficult to understand and accept that not only do we believe this, but we chose it. And not only did we choose it, but we continue to choose it. It is not that I chose it once in the past—I am choosing it right now. One of the real values of the Course (it may seem to be a dubious value at first, but in the end it is very healing) is that it helps us uncover the seething mass of hatred—the self-hatred within us that the whole world was made to mask. We read all the time about the pain and suffering in the world—in Africa, for example, or Russia, or our own country, or any other place in the world. And our tendency is to say, "Yes, it's pretty terrible, but it's outside me. What does it have to do with me?"

Well, if I am upset by anything in the world—not if I just see it objectively—then it must be because I am first seeing it in myself. But I do not want to see it in my mind, so I project it out in order to see it outside me. This basic dynamic goes on all the time with us. Something in our minds is so awful—the terrible feeling of guilt and self-hatred, and the terror of being annihilated as a result—that we choose not to look at it. We project it outside ourselves and then deal with it as if it were outside us, and not us. That is the importance of this splitting-off dynamic: I do not want to see it in myself, so I split in two. And the part I do not want to see in myself is now seen outside me, so that it is not me. It is outside me and I deal with it outside me. I never have to deal with it within me, because I do not even know it is in me anymore. The Course helps us, through the miracle, to begin to erase the veil ([**see chart**](https://facim.org/online-learning-aids/excerpt-series/separation-and-forgiveness/separation-and-forgiveness-part-v/javascript%3Avoid%280%29)). But the miracle does not erase it all at once—it does a little bit at a time. This process goes slowly, because, as the veil is erased, I become aware, through the miracle, that the problem is not outside me—it is inside me. And then, as most students who work with the Course over a period of time report, things seem to get worse. They seem to be much more anxious, or much more frightened, or much sicker, or much more in conflict than they ever had been in their lives. But it is not that they never before were this anxious, or this fearful, etc.—they just were not aware of it.

In a passage near the end of Chapter 27, Jesus talks about how we were able to name so many different things as causes of our pain, but we never once thought the cause was our guilt (T-27.VII.7:4). We are very good at investigating the causes of all our problems—all the pain, all the despair, all the discomfort. We do it individually. And throughout history there have been many brilliant people who have told us the causes of our problems—from a medical level, a political level, an economic level, a social level, etc. But we have never once considered that the cause of all of our problems is our guilt.

We have lived our lives denying all this pain, not wanting to see it as ours. Even when we do begin to feel something, we attribute it to something else outside us. So Jesus in the Course tells us that the cause of all of our problems is not outside us. In fact, the cause of all the world's problems lies in this blue dot—the power of our minds to choose the ego instead of the Holy Spirit. That is the problem. Once we accept that, we can nevermore believe we are at the mercy of forces beyond our control (T-19.IV.D.7:4). But we all believe that we are. In a passage in the "Laws of Chaos," after Jesus describes in some detail the five horrible laws which are clearly insane and murderous—depicting not only what we believe goes on between ourselves and God, but what we also believe goes on between ourselves and each other—he says in effect that it would seem impossible that we would ever believe these laws, they are so insane. And then he says, "Brother, you do believe them" (T-23.II.18:3). The proof that we believe them is that we are here. No one in his right mind would ever come here!

That is very important to remember. No one in his right mind could ever come into this world unless, of course, love guided him to. This world is not where we are, not where we belong, and it certainly is not a place that can make us happy. Heaven is where we are and where we belong, totally at one with God. The fact that we identify with being here is not a sin, but it is certainly a big mistake. The fact that we identify with our physical and psychological selves, and are concerned about what other physical and psychological selves do with us is proof that we do believe all this. Remember, what roots us in this world is our fear of the guilt in our minds. That is how the whole thing started. The ego tells us our reality is not love, but sin and guilt. And it tells us that the way we escape from the sin and guilt is to split it off and project it onto God, so that He becomes the One Who will punish us. This is the third split.

The ego then says, "But this is so terrible—there's no way out. We need another split." Our attention now gets rooted in a world that we literally believe is outside our minds. We believe our identity is in a body. We literally believe that is who we are! And we never then, according to the ego, have to deal with the battleground in our minds. That is the glue that continually binds us to the world and to all of our specialness. That is why we do not want to let go of our specialness. That is why people can read this Course, time after time, year upon year, and literally not see what it says about the ego.

Many students want to see only the lovely and loving parts of the Course that talk about happiness and peace and joy, and pay no attention to all the parts on specialness, because it is so painful to face what is brought up. It triggers a remembrance of what is in our minds, which is what we have sought to avoid. That is the purpose of the world. Remember, the world is a smokescreen, a hiding place, a distraction device so that we never have to get in touch with the guilt inside ourselves. Instead, we split it off and see it in another. Anyone we are involved with where there is any degree of emotion—negative or positive –must be a split off part of ourselves. Otherwise, we would not feel the emotion.
. . . . . . .

[Ken referred briefly to Freud's essay, "Mourning and Melancholia," in which Freud talks about the sense of loss experienced at the death of a loved one. Ken concluded with the statement that, when we know that the Love of God is within us, we also know that the loved one is a part of us, and that nothing that happens on a physical plane can ever alter that, because we know that nothing is happening, because we are all one. Ken then continued:]

When that becomes the only vision and the only understanding we have, we have reached what the Course calls the real world. The decision maker chooses the Holy Spirit once and for all and stops being a decision maker, because the ego falls away and disappears. At that point I know that all the seemingly separated Sons of God are one. My experience then is that all the seeming fragments are part of the whole, and I am a part of that whole. It is not that the others are a part of me, as my identity, but that we are all part of a larger whole. And so there cannot be any experience of loss.

That basically is what Jesus taught from the cross: literally nothing happened. People who mourned his death were those who had identified with his body—an obvious thing to do—who felt that his love was what would save them. Then he disappeared, he died, and they thought that love died, that salvation died with him. Yet the whole message he was teaching was that the love people felt in him was a reflection of the love that was in them. If they could truly understand that, they would realize that they and Jesus were one and the same—they shared the same loving Self, which means there could be no experience of loss.

Of course, Jesus was really teaching us, within the symbolism of our dream, that that is exactly what we believed happened with God. We believed we split off from God, we believed there was a sense of loss, and then we fabricated the whole story that God was angry at us and wanted to punish us, etc. But if we can know that we are literally one with God's Love, then there is no sense of loss. And we then realize the ego's separation thought has no power—"not one note in Heaven's song was missed."
. . . . . . .

[Another participant was asking Ken for guidance in applying the principles he had been talking about:]

**K:** I think basically your question is, how does this actually play out on a day-to-day basis? What do I do? As soon as I become aware of an ego thought or feeling—and after a while it is not difficult to find them: I get annoyed at somebody, I get anxious, I feel physically ill, I am making judgments about others—I want to realize that "I am never upset for the reason I think," as an early workbook lesson (W-pI.5) says, and that what I am seeing outside is really a split-off part of myself. The reason I am anxious, angry, annoyed, frightened, sick, etc., has nothing to do with what I feel or believe about the situation. The reason is that I have dropped Jesus' hand and have taken the ego's hand again. That is the problem. And then I feel terribly guilty, because once again I have pushed God away—in the person of Jesus or the Holy Spirit—and I feel guilty about that. And I am now afraid I am going to be punished for it. So I escape from all that guilt and fear by getting involved with whatever outside me I think is making me upset.

As I work through all this—following the line of the miracle ([**see chart**](https://facim.org/online-learning-aids/excerpt-series/separation-and-forgiveness/separation-and-forgiveness-part-v/javascript%3Avoid%280%29))—I am realizing that I am not upset because of something outside me. I am upset because of something inside me. I am upset that I chose the ego instead of Jesus or the Holy Spirit. That is all I have to do, and I am finished. That is what the Course refers to as the "little willingness." If I do this and still do not feel better, then I say,

I'm not feeling better because, even though I understand what I'm doing—I'm really pushing the Love of God away from me—I obviously still want to push the Love of God away. I believe the Love of God will hurt me. I believe that if I take the hand of Jesus and start walking back home, I will disappear. And all the wonderful self-importance that I believe makes me who I am will also disappear. And that terrifies me. So I am perfectly willing, right now, to pay the cost of pushing Jesus away so I can maintain my own miserable identity—I'm willing to do that.

Now that I can do. In a sense I can have my cake and eat it. I can still hold on to all my anger, anxiety, and justified victimhood. But I also know why I am doing it and what I am giving up. I am aware that I am more afraid of God's Love than I am of this pain. And I would rather keep myself separate from you—which is what my anger does—than really know that you and I are part of a larger self. That is all I have to do—just be aware that that is what I am doing.

**Q:** Ken, who or what is Jesus?

**K:** He is both a "who" and a "what." As a "what," he is a symbol of the Holy Spirit's Love. He is the same abstract presence of love in the mind that the Holy Spirit is. At the very end when we are in the real world, we will know that. Until that point, he is a "who," and he is an extremely important "who." As long as I believe I am a "who," I need a "what" that looks like a "who." [Laughter] Now why does that make me think of Abbott and Costello! But as long as I believe that I am specific—and we all believe that we are specific, that we are a "who"—then we need another specific symbol that will represent for us that abstract Presence of Love that the Holy Spirit is. And I am making a big mistake if I think I don't need a "who."

If Jesus is a difficult symbol for you, choose another one. But for most people in the western world, he is it, because almost everyone has unresolved issues with him. In the end, Jesus is abstract because in the end we are abstract. But as long as we feel ourselves to be specific, distinct, and individual, we need someone who can speak to us on that level. And Jesus, as the greatest symbol in the western world of God's Love, is also the greatest symbol in the western world of God's Love as the ego sees it. That is why Jesus has not been a loving symbol for Christians, let alone Jews or Moslems or anyone who has attacked Christians. He is always seen through the eyes of the ego. He is seen as a persecutor, as someone who demands sacrifice, and who believes in sin and guilt. He must believe in sacrifice and death, because that is what the world has made of him: He has become a symbol of the ego's god.

But Jesus also is a symbol of the real God. Our reactions to him are a product of the same split mind that affects how we see everyone else. In the end, when we are in the real world, we will realize that we do not exist as separate individuals any more than Jesus does. But as long as we are here in the dream—as we all are—he is extremely important as a presence outside our personality who can represent us to ourselves, until we can remember our Identity.

**Q:** But would it invalidate the Course if I chose to use Buddha or Krishna or Mohammed or whoever as this symbol?

**K:** No. Actually nothing can invalidate this book—that's the problem! However, if I choose Mohammed or Krishna or Buddha or even Chaimyankel because I am afraid of Jesus, or guilty about my relationship with him, that is a problem I am going to have to address at some point. That is why Jesus' presence in the Course has always been up front. The same teaching could have come without talking about Jesus at all. This whole process that I have described could be presented in the Course without referring to Jesus. And it was not necessary that he speak in the first person. The fact that he did, and that he uses Christian terminology, and that he speaks about his own death and reinterprets it for us, is a way of saying to the world, as he says in Chapter 19, that he needs us to forgive him (T-19.IV.B.6,8).

Now Jesus does not need us to forgive him for his own sake. He needs us to forgive him because he cannot help us if we are still pushing him away. So before I choose another symbol besides Jesus, I should first look at why I am doing that. There are always exceptions, and there is no right or wrong way of doing the Course. But for almost everyone who grew up in the western world—whether raised as a Christian or a Jew—it would be extremely difficult to avoid having some unresolved issues with Jesus. He is the greatest symbol of the Love of God that we know, which means the ego has made him its symbol of the Love of God.

**Q:** Is Jesus' crucifixion an example of "God as victim"?

**K:** Absolutely. His death is the great example of that. All Christians then, regardless of whether they are conscious of it or not, must believe he is victimizing them. There is a statue of Jesus on the cross, a crucifix, as you approach the main gate of a famous monastery. And underneath the cross is a sign with the terrible words, "This is what I did for you. What have you done for me?" Now how could you love a guy like that? Anyone who has grown up in the western world must believe Jesus is a victimizer.

There is an even deeper reason for this perception of Jesus, which I have not addressed in this workshop, but I will do it briefly now. The ego thought system is based on the idea, "kill or be killed" (M-17.7:11), which is the same as saying that it is "one or the other." The entire thought system of the ego rests on the belief that we are different—that is how the ego thought system starts. God is different from the Son. Remember where we began—God and Christ are totally unified. There is no way that God can perceive Himself in relationship to Christ or Christ can perceive Himself in relationship to God. There is no difference. Within the dream, when we speak of Heaven, we speak of a difference—God is the Creator, Christ is the created. But in Heaven, there is no separated mind that sees that way—God and Christ are not different.

The thought system of the ego begins with differences. When the dream seemed to begin, and the tiny, mad idea seemed to arise in the mind of the Son, all of a sudden God and the Son were different. So the Son said, "We are different—God has something I do not have. Therefore I will take it." What God had of course was the power to create the Son—it was not the other way around. So the Son stole the power to create from God, and he now has it. The Son is still different from God, but now he is on top—as in the game of seesaw. With the third split, where the sinful, guilty self splits into two ([**see chart**](https://facim.org/online-learning-aids/excerpt-series/separation-and-forgiveness/separation-and-forgiveness-part-v/javascript%3Avoid%280%29)), there are new differences. I am no longer sinful—God is sinful, because He is going to attack me.

The thought system of the ego is predicated upon the belief in differences. In contrast, the thought system of the Holy Spirit, which is the reflection of Heaven, is predicated on the belief that we are all the same. Sure, we are different on the level of the body and form, but those differences do not make a difference.

The ego thought system asserts—and the world reflects this thinking—that if God has it, I do not have it. But if I have it, He does not have it. It is one or the other. Either I am the miserable sinner or God is. Of course it is much easier for me to get off the hook by projecting the sin onto God. And once we do that, which is the third split, it all then gets projected out onto the world—I see everyone else as having something I do not have. And why do they have it and I do not? Because they took it from me, and that justifies my stealing it back from them. That really is the kernel of special relationships.

Getting back to Jesus—if Jesus is the Love of God incarnate, then obviously I cannot be, because it is one or the other. It cannot be that we are the same. If we are the same, then the Holy Spirit is telling me the truth. But if Jesus is different from me, then my ego is alive and well. And obviously Jesus is total innocence, total love, and total light. So what does that leave me? Since I believe I am the home of evil, darkness, and sin, then I believe I am this evil, guilty self, and Jesus is innocent, holy, and loving. Listening to my ego, I ask, "Where did he get it from? How come he is so loving, and how come he is God's favorite and I am not?" Well, the answer is obvious—he stole it from me. It is just like the story of Isaac and Jacob in the Bible, where Jacob fools his father and steals the birthright from Esau.

Where did Jesus get his love and his innocence? He stole it from me. How do I know he stole it from me? Because I secretly believe I stole it from him. And why do I believe I stole it from him? Because that is what I believe I did with God. It always comes back to this underlying metaphysical idea, which is how I began this workshop. That is why we always feel we are at war with each other. I secretly believe that whatever I have, I stole, because that is the basic premise of the ego thought system. The very fact that I believe I exist as a separate entity—and we all believe we exist as separate entities—is proof that I stole the power, the life of that separate entity, from God. And if I believe I stole it, and I feel guilty about it, what do I do? I split off the sin and the guilt—that is what egos do. I split it off, and say, "I'm not sinful and guilty. You are." The real reason I am unhappy and miserable—and all of us deep within our hearts are unhappy and miserable—is that I am here. This is not a happy world. Heaven is the happy world. On some level I feel there is something missing in me—there is something unfair and I am unhappy.

Why am I unhappy? Rather than accepting responsibility for how I feel, I split it off. Why is there something missing in me? Because you stole it from me. And why do I know you stole it from me? Because I believe I first stole it from you, but then I projected the attack onto you, except I forgot that I did so. Consciously, all I am aware of is that you have something I do not have, and I hate you for it. That is why the world has always hated Jesus: he has always been seen as different from us, which is exactly the opposite of what he taught. He taught us that

The Love of God you experience in me is a reflection of the Love of God in you. The only difference between us is that I know it, and you have forgotten it. So I stand in front of you now as a reminder that you can make the same choice to remember that I did.

If the world accepted that, the world would disappear, because the entire world exists as a way to keep that realization away from us.

Remember—the ego's original and ultimate fear is that the Son of God will come to his senses, return to his right mind, and choose the Holy Spirit, which means the Son of God will remember he is the Love of God. Therefore the ego has made up a story of sin, guilt and fear, projected the sin onto a wrathful Father Whom it has also made up, and then it has made up a world in which the sin, guilt, and fear are played out over and over again. Jesus comes along and says, "This whole thing is silly. It is all made up. You do not have to fight against the Love of God—you are the Love of God." If the world accepted his love and his resplendent light as their own, then the whole need for the world as a defense against the love and the light would disappear. We do not need a hiding place from God if we know that we are the Love and the light of God.

But rather than admit that—which would mean admitting that the ego thought system is wrong, and admitting that I no longer have to exist as a separate and individual being—it is much easier to kill off Jesus, which is what the world did. Not only did it kill him physically, but it took his message and massacred it—turning it upside down so it literally meant the opposite of what he taught. By the way, you will find that people are doing the same thing with the Course—turning its message upside down so they do not have to look at what the Course—and Jesus—are really saying. Jesus is saying, "Look with me at the enormity of what you believe are your sins and your terrible guilt"—what he refers to at one point as your "secret sins and hidden hates" (T-31.VIII.9:2)—"And if you look with me, you will realize there is nothing there. And then all that will remain is the light of love, which you are. And then you will realize that I am not separate from you, and that you and I are part of that one greater light and one greater Love."